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**AN AVATAR IN VISHNU LAND**

“*‘so I saw the last  
Of Waring!’—You? Oh, never star  
Was lost here, but it rose afar!  
Look East, where whole new thousands are!  
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?’*”

BROWNING.

# **An Avatar In Vishnu Land**

Concerning chiefly  
**VIROSCHAND GANESHKIND, MERCHANT  
OF INDIA**

BY  
**STANLEY WARBURTON**

**WITH MAP**

**LONDON  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
1928**

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TO  
J. H. W.  
WHO BORE A GRIEVOUS BURDEN FOR ME  
IN MY UTMOST NEED



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

A sense of my grave responsibility to the reading public of America prompts me to inform them that I have moved the position of several places in the appended narrative, Allahbunder in particular, which is several degrees of latitude and longitude out of its true position.

One does not become the first cause of a fierce inter-racial conflict, however innocently, without subsequent reflection on the dangers that may ensue. I am not at all sure that an Indian Court of Justice would acquit me of all responsibility in connection with the said conflict.

Caution is therefore imperative.

It was my misfortune to serve a term of years in prison for breaking certain ordinances of a Government it was my duty to respect. I became, in fact, a disorderly person, abhorred of Vishnu, the Preserver of Order in Vishnu Land.

I think Vishnu has forgiven me, but I am not so sure about the Government.

I have no desire to put the latter matter to the test, therefore let Allahbunder be in latitude 21 N. and longitude 73 E. for the purpose of this narrative.

STANLEY Warburton.

New York City, 1928.



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**AN AVATAR IN VISHNU LAND**



## CHAPTER I

### MOSTLY AT CALCUTTA

We had been thrashing along before the tail of the monsoon for three days and two nights when the tragedy happened. Our ship was the three-masted schooner *Shah Jehan*, out of Allahbunder. The after-guard consisted of myself and Casmyth and the fo'c'sle hands were kalashis from the Straits Settlement, under a Burmese serang, all picked up at the time we took over the ship. Viroschand was the owner, and he used the *Shah Jehan* as a yacht, or chartered her out for coastal work. He had left the ship at Allahbunder after one of his rare trips in search of health and new business, and we took her over after sending Viroschand's crew down to Bombay.

What a sail we had in that ship! Even now I think it was worth all we went through to get it. A dead calm had set in after the monsoon blew out, and before evening fell we guessed we had about done with the monsoon. There would be nothing but the usual gentle morning and evening breezes for the rest of our long journey, so it was no use bustling any more.

As the sea went down, a lethargy of spirit and body settled on me, partly due to reaction from the past fifty hours of excitement, and, I suspect, partly due to the effect of the brilliant rising moon on the dark mirror of the sea. The serang was at the wheel, though it hardly seemed worth while turning the spokes, we had so little way on. Casmyth was below with several of the crew, trying to get the auxiliary started. The

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only other member of the crew on deck besides the serang was the lookout, crouched forward in the bows like a mahogany monkey in dungarees. Not a craft of any kind was in sight, and we seemed to have the whole vast Indian Ocean to ourselves. So complete was the feeling of immobility after the storm, so complete the sense of detachment from actuality, that common solid things around me almost seemed to take on the possibility of translation into other significances, such is the witchery of the Indian moonlight.

The serang was crooning softly to himself in that endless Asiatic way they have, the tune softly rising and falling, and rising at last into a long-sustained thin note like a mosquito near one's ear. How long I had been looking at the moonlit sea I do not know, but I am certain I did not doze, and I am equally certain that I saw Viroschand as clearly as ever I saw him in the flesh in his Calcutta office. Then came that awful explosion. I was lifted clean off my feet and the schooner amidships burst into flames.

Casmyth told me afterwards that he had sent two of the crew to the oil and petrol store to fill an oil can, and he thinks they mistook a petrol drum for oil, poured it out by the light of a candle, and you can imagine the rest. I do not think Casmyth was right, as I shall explain in time and place. But whatever the cause, the schooner was blazing from stem to stern in a few moments.

How strange that vision was, stranger still to come at such a moment! The last time I had seen Viroschand was in his office in Calcutta when I went with Casmyth to lay that proposal before him that landed us in such a mess half way up the Gulf. I remember it clearly, as one does such meetings when a great issue is at stake. But none of the details of that meeting, either of Viroschand or his surroundings, were so crystal-clear as the

details of him in that vision or visitation or whatever it was, that I had just before our ship blew up. I had long been deeply interested in Viroschand, he was for some reason, unlike any other Indian I ever met. There was something about his eyes that gripped one's attention at once, a gleam of sincerity seemed to shine from them, an almost boyish eagerness to convince you at all cost of the transparent honesty of his purpose. In business he made it obvious he meant to succeed if he possibly could, but at the same time it was obvious, too, that he meant that success to be achieved by square and open dealing only. Other Indians I have dealt with in business seemed only too anxious to convey an impression of extreme subtlety. I am convinced that Viroschand wrested many a victory from his opponents by the unexpected quality of his methods. Who would expect it in an Indian? The essence of tactics is surprise. Viroschand was a constant source of surprise, particularly to me, for I was frequently his opponent before I became his colleague.

And there was something else, some habit of speech or manner, that distinguished him as an Indian. I have heard it said that our manners make our fortune; I can well believe it helped to make the vast fortune he piled up.

What was that distinguishing trait in Viroschand? You felt it all the time, in little things or big, and he tackled some of the biggest things that ever got past the jute market or the stock and share bazaar. His dealings were princely in magnitude, and by some accounts royal in risk. He had lots of enemies of course, who said he was as crooked as a dog's hind leg, and they weren't all natives either, as you might expect. A jute man once told me a tale in the long bar at Singapore, that seemed to throw a rather lurid light on some of Viroschand's activities, but I have been too long in

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jute myself to credit all the stories I hear about the wickedness of successful rivals. Perhaps he was no better or worse than the rest of us, forced by the risks of his innumerable enterprises to help himself at times with the nearest tool he could lay hands on. Sometimes such tools sear the soul and the memory, too. We wonder afterwards if it would not have been better to fail than to succeed by the help of such aids. Be that as it may, Viroschand always conveyed the impression that he meant to succeed by doing the straight thing.

Even when we put our last scheme before him, and after he had agreed to come in, I felt he would have liked to induce us to leave it alone altogether. We convinced him there was plenty of money in it, but I am certain he would gladly have lost all the money he advanced if he could have persuaded us to keep out of such a gamble, though gambling was the essence of his own gigantic concern. There may have been some other reason besides his desire to keep us out of such a risky enterprise, I felt it dimly the whole time we were talking over that Gulf business, but we never got to the reason in plain terms. Money was not the principal thing we needed to launch our enterprise; a good ship was far more important than money to us then. But the little (comparatively speaking) he let us have was more than he could afford at the time. Even while he stressed the ethical aspect of our proposal his affairs were tottering; one little gamble more or less at that time could have meant nothing to him, except in the sense of a lifebelt thrown by happy accident to a drowning man. Yet he persisted in his efforts to dissuade us from the whole enterprise. Knowing the breed that produced him, it seems almost incredible that he could take the attitude he did, with his affairs in such a state. He was a Marwari, and when you have said

that, you have said everything; he was trained from his childhood to snatch profit from risk, to turn a crisis of his affairs by a last lucky throw with fortune. He had everything to lose, I admit; the security I was able to put up was not very good, a lot of Parsee second mortgages, and Casmyth had only Indian mining stock and a half share of a horse, in the big sweep (Viroschand would not hear of my friend's proposal to commute part of his pension). I sometimes think it was the half horse that pulled Viroschand in, it was such a whimsical piece of security. The horse was not a favorite, but the half share had an actual monetary value in Calcutta, it could have been sold any day for thousands of rupees. But despite the fact that our collateral was so inferior to our promises and hopes, I am certain Viroschand did not try to dissuade us for that reason.

I am not going into all the details of our proposal; it is only necessary to say it concerned the transportation and distribution of health-giving table waters, aperient and otherwise, in the heart of the ever-mysterious East. We meant to tap a new market, with a new commodity as the faucet. Our clientele was that changeless chain of tribes (for you can't call them nations) that inhabit the coastal ports north of the Rann of Kutch, on up the Gulf past Chabas and Jask where the cable stops. I still think there is a fortune in it, and if I could find anyone here in New York who could understand what I was talking about, I mean anyone who was able to judge my statements for the facts they are, I would soon have all the money I needed, if ever I wished to start all over again on that adventure. But what is the use of discussing such things, it is like talking of the beauties of a color scheme to a blind man, when he does not even know the elementary chromatics of the spectrum.

You will see that Casmyth and I were to be the

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working partners, and Viroschand the capitalist behind us. Casmyth knew the whole coast like a book, from Bombay to Baluchistan and to Basra beyond. He had been on the Gulf station when he was in the Merchant Service, and afterwards he had worked the coast in the Indian Mercantile Marine. I knew the place fairly well, for prior to going into the jute business I was, as a young man, on the Bombay side for many years. I did business up as far as Karachi, mostly coastwise, and I was always a keen amateur sailor, delighting in long cruises up and down the seaboard, so I can say I knew our location well. There are any amount of keen yachtsmen on the Bombay side (the Yacht Club on Apollo Bunder is a hive of nautical enthusiasts) but their activities are usually restricted to week-end cruises and pukka racing. I never got much "kick" out of that, my delight was a well-thought-out month at sea. It is the most comfortable way of seeing India, which is essentially a place where you take your own comfort about with you or do without it altogether. Besides, the place fascinated me. I never tired of studying the people; there has been no ethnological work of any value done on that side of Kutch, it is a virgin field and it will be tilled one day as thoroughly as the Euphrates Valley. There is no end to the possibilities of research there. For one thing, it is nearly certain that Alexander the Great brought all his reserves down this coast, and that alone is a pretty good start.

But the chief factors in our scheme were my knowledge of the language and local dialects, and Casmyth's knowledge of the shipping end. I was to do distribution, and he transportation, and—we were "in on the ground floor." We were, that is, if we kept the enterprise sufficiently secret, which meant organizing everything from a native port. That is what we thought then, and that is where we went wrong. It can't be done like that.

I know now how it can be done, but I am not going into it here, because I don't want it to be tried.

The fact is the place is as virgin a field for commercial enterprise (of the right kind) as it is ethnologically. The people are not very religious, not being very high caste, but as far as their religion goes they are the most enthusiastic religious bigots I ever met in India, and that is a "whale" of a statement as they say in the virile vernacular here.

A little skilful "dustar" and "poojah" by the local priest and our stuff would have gone like hot cakes. Fancy ailments and eating are their principal interests in life. They will buy any sort or kind of patent medicine in the world and pay any price for it. But that has been done already from the land side. Our little scheme was far more subtle, it was in fact to combine gastronomy with hydropathy, and save all the overhead by taking the whole works with us. The stuff cost us practically nothing to make, except the printing of the labels (they are my finest literary efforts to date) and the bottling and packing. As we put it to Viroschand, "it's exercise or table waters for the Gulf Intelligentsia, or they will never get the full flavor of the benefits of Local Autonomy." Everybody knows that they will never take any exercise; for one thing, it is far too hot, and for another, it is obvious that life is too short for anything but plotting darkly against everything in general and one's nearest neighbor in particular. With our life-giving waters, taken consistently and frequently, the fumes of indigestion would nevermore becloud the reason, and the profoundest intricacies of local or foreign machinations would be unraveled as easily as the initial problems of cat's-cradle. I am now sketching the rough design of our packing literature and the outstanding characteristics of the mentality we were dealing with. Oh! it was a peach of a scheme, we could have

tramped that coast "till the cows came home." The beauty of our scheme was that it had a solid basis in a definite local necessity, or rather a series of necessities. I pictured the expansion of our market in all its manifold possibilities—the Hunyadi János, Vichy, Perrier, Apollinaris possibilities, and all the other European parallels. There was no end to it as an outlet for legitimate enterprise!

As for the scale of our profits and the ethics of the scheme generally, I thought then it was not worse than retailing sixpence worth of whisky (and poor stuff at that) for 12/6 in England and five or six dollars in America. And there are a lot of people who set up a lot of pretensions on the sale of worse commodities than that, and certainly far worse than the stuff we sold.

The principal thing about our stuff was the fizz. It took us a long time to get that right. It is difficult to keep sparkle in anything in that climate, either in wits, wines, or waters. I don't know why, but it is so; ask any man who has lived in that part of the East and he will tell you that better soda-water could be scooped out of the "ditch" at Suez than they usually spoil good liquor with in Eastern clubs. But eventually we got the fizz and the pop well enough. We carted half a dozen into Viroschand's office on the morning of that famous interview, and the cork flew out in fine style from the bottle we opened to drink the success of the scheme. Viroschand never drank whisky himself, at least in public, but he always kept a bottle of the best for people like ourselves. By that time we had made him understand that we meant to go through with the thing, with his help or without it.

He said, "Sahibs, I see you have set your minds on this thing, let us therefore drink heartily to the success of the Great Gulf Adventure." Casmyth had only been waiting for some such moment as this, and at his shout

of "*Ho! Ram Das, fizz pani muncta, jeldi lao!*" in dashed his servant with the basket of bottles.

It was a steaming hot morning, the regular monsoon sort, with the sun bringing out the steam of the previous night's deluge. Those breaks in the downpour are worse than the monsoon itself. Steam everywhere, everything sodden or green-moldy, even the magnificent marble floor of Viroschand's office had a film of steam over it. I remember the pattiwala's feet making bright watery marks in his track as he brought in telegrams and letters for Viroschand. The office despite its polished Gothic, teak, bronze and marble fittings, looked like a washer-woman's scullery. The damp maps on the walls sagged from their pins, and the photographs of Viroschand's mills bulged behind their glass. Our clothes clung to our bodies with the damp heat, catching at the knee and elbow in the exasperating monsoon way, and Viroschand's muslin "*dohta*" hung in limp folds round his legs. He was tall for a Hindu, and very thin, and never affected European clothes, bar the long black silk coat which he put on specially to meet people like us. In the privacy of his inner office I expect he sat in his shirt with the tails hanging outside his *dohta*, and I don't blame him; but business hours always brought the coat and a stiff linen collar. That collar was a symbol to him, I imagine, of European discipline, which he moderated by never on any occasion getting a tie to go with it. Not that one noticed the lack of neckwear, the magnificence of his collar-stud seemed to excuse all that—a whacking great diamond that sparkled and shone like the bright light of his own sincerity, and as unexpected, too. There was something incongruous about that great diamond collar-stud; his whole outfit would have been dear at 30 rupees (10 dollars), for the *dohta* was always plain white muslin stuff, and the shoes usually the 6-rupee patent-leather horrors of the bazaar.

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I never saw him wear socks on his skinny shanks, even when Xmas brought a cold snap in the mornings. His turban, too, was a wisp of cheap dark stuff, devoid of all markings or ornament, for he made no pretensions to caste. He always described himself as a Marwari, which is about a two spot in the social deck, but to my eye he looked a pretty high-caste man. I never knew much about the Marwari caste he said he belonged to. I often wanted to ask him about it, but as everyone knows, it's a delicate subject; a high-caste man may resent inquiry and a low-caste man will be a little diffident about a matter which is likely to belittle him in the eyes of Europeans. Not that Viroschand would have cared a scrap either way, he would have told me without hesitation, anything I cared to know, and it would have been the truth, but somehow I never got around to the matter with him. I wish I had though; the Marwari originally came from Marwar, according to Longworth Dames, and most other authorities. But how do you account for a tribe of Kachis or border Baloch with the name of Marwari? Longworth Dames says with disarming frankness "I don't know." Well, neither do I, but Viroschand, I fancy, could have told me. The whole subject is obscure, the further you delve into it the more obscure it seems to get, and the greatest obscurity of all is that race of robbers and pirates from the lost world of Kach, the best part of a thousand miles from their progenitors, as I think. It is not difficult to perceive how a race of robbers becomes a race of bankers and financiers when translated to civilization. The reverse *is*. Look at Wall Street!

Well, you can see us sitting there together in that vast outer office, like noisy boys in a damp Gothic church, for we were pretty free and easy by the time the famous table waters and whisky got going, and I dare say more so when Viroschand gave us the check we

needed. Casmyth was singing softly that famous sailor song of his:

"Many a night I've spent  
With many a mermaid,"

and we were all feeling rather elevated with the combined effects of good whisky and successful enterprise, though even then I could not help remarking the tempered enthusiasm of friend Viroschand. The head clerk who made out the check was a jolly old fat Hindoo, who beamed over his spectacles at Casmyth and me while he dipped the pen and held it for Viroschand, but as I look back I remember the half-frightened look that took the place of his smiles when he passed me on his way out (I was not much interested in his looks, smiles or otherwise, at the time, but I came to a different state of mind later, as I shall tell in time and place). I was looking at one of those monster photographs of Viroschand's mills, and had just polished the glass a bit to get a better view and as I stepped back, I bumped into that old head clerk. Of course I wheeled around quickly to apologize, and it was then that I remarked the frightened look on that old fraud's face. He was as badly dipped as his master, it turned out afterwards, and skipped to French territory down Pondicherry way on an embezzlement charge of about a couple of million rupees. Never found, of course. They never are, in such cases. Pondicherry is full of such people and you might as well try to get a wrinkle out of its shell with a blunt stick as try to get an absconding Indian out of there. If you ever see the place you will know why. Not that Viroschand ever *did* try, in my opinion that old fraud would have been perfectly safe in Calcutta, as far as Viroschand was concerned; but the hue and cry raised by the old clerk's sponging relatives cut Viroschand to the quick. A lesser man would have sheltered

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behind that embezzlement. Heaven knows the time was not far off when shelter of any kind would have been a godsend to him; not for Viroschand though, he only concerned himself with holding those harpies off the old man's trail. The whole incident was typical of our friend. I wouldn't mind betting a hundred rupees he knew where his clerk was all the time, though he never let drop a word about it at his trial or afterward, to my knowledge.

You hear a lot about the loyalty of employees nowadays, especially in the big cases here, but by gad, I never heard anything to touch the loyalty of Viroschand to his employee. An old and trusted friend fallen by the way, that was Viroschand's inner thought I'll be bound, and all he thought, too.

Well, we got back a few days after the defalcations were first made public, just in time to pile on the agony of our Gulf failure. We were in a pretty state, shaking with fever, deaf with quinine, dirty, disheveled, and rotten with lack of sleep. All Viroschand said was, "Sahibs, troubles come in troops," and that is the nearest approach to a reference to the absconder I ever heard him make. Not a word of reproach to us for our miserable bungling; just that bit of metaphor, and his brave smile. I never felt so hard hit in my life, for we had heard on the way through the town how desperate Viroschand's affairs were. The deputy station-master, who knew us both well, was the first to break the news, and the postmaster-general confirmed our fears when we dropped in at the Central for letters. I sha'n't forget that metaphor of Viroschand's in a hurry; not that he was addicted to English pat phrases, like most Indians. He wasn't, his English was perfect, and what is still more remarkable he never talked for effect. It was always the right word or nothing, and most frequently nothing. I have rarely met a man, either brown, black

or white, so choice in speech, and the greatness of his smile when words failed to meet the case was a revelation in fine feeling. The essential goodness of the man shone out at such moments, brilliantly, like his own bright diamond-stud, if that simile isn't too far fetched.

I don't mean to convey the idea that Viroschand set up for being a good man in the "goody" sense of the word, he was too much of a sportsman for that. He ran a string of horses and he made his stable bills like the rest of the Owners, and I never heard of a silly prude yet who could do that much at racing, in the East.

But the treachery of that old head clerk, gloze it how he would, must have been a bad blow to our friend, coming at the time it did. I think most men would have thrown up the sponge then, but Viroschand got two deep creases down his cheeks, keeping up that fine smile of his, and that was the only outward difference the whole show made, as far as I could see. I'm forgetting though, he came near a breakdown once, and it was only near, the night Casmyth and I saw him off to Bombay soon after we got back from the Gulf. We took him by surprise even then, or it would never have happened, that I'll swear. Casmyth and I had dined at the club in the evening of our return to civilization, and on the spur of the moment we decided to see our friend off at the station. He had told us during our last interview that he was off by the night train, and he made it quite clear that the Bombay people were after him like a pack of wolves. Cotton stock I suppose, though I never rightly knew the business end of the matter, which is a funny thing, when you come to think of it, but I must say I did not feel much like a business man the morning we got back from the Gulf, certainly not enough to go into such a matter with Viroschand till I'd had a bath and a good English meal. Anyway, it was vital for him to stave off those

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Bombay jackals, that much I had grip enough to apprehend. You must remember that this was in the Gothic office and Viroschand was handing back our securities. Casmyth told him bluntly to sell the lot and settle up. Viroschand only replied, "Sahibs, we need not go into that till I get back from Bombay." I got that clear enough despite the fever and quinine buzzing round in my head. There was a long queue of people waiting in the corridor outside, all excited or frightened or both and all spitting betel juice over everything in reach. I remember pushing through the fetid mob, and cursing them for not getting a "jeldi" on as we made for the club, after our interview. Gad, I needed a drink then, and needed it more when the full meaning of Viroschand's visit to Bombay got through my bursting head. The tide of disaster was sweeping our friend to ruin, nothing less!

Casmyth wasn't so far gone as I was, and it did not take him two seconds to see what it all meant.

"Oh, why didn't we wait another week?" was all he said, right up to dinner-time. It was a silent meal, that dinner. I kept on thinking about poor Viroschand and wishing we had waited as he advised us; I might have spared myself the trouble, for I know now that the time of our starting had very little to do with our disasters. The whole trip was doomed from the start and perhaps before. But you can't know those things in advance, and I don't know that we should have altered our plans much if we had. Yes, that was a silent meal, scarcely a word between us. I know *I* couldn't eat, although I had been looking forward to good English food so much for weeks. The head steward even got out his famous bottled quails to try to tempt us, but it was no good, and at last Casmyth said—"Look here, let's go and see Viroschand off, we can just manage it if we go now." I pushed away from the table on the word and marched

straight down the dining-room. We got our hats, and a passing taxi took us to the station in record time. There's not much traffic in the streets at that hour, except cows and trams. The ticket collector at the barrier gave one look at our dinner jackets and opened the gates. I expect he knew us, and besides, lots of men do the same thing regularly, quick club dinner and change into pajamas as soon as the train starts. That is the last decent meal you get for two days, and you can't get it without some kind of dinner jacket, either white or black, but it's worth it, even though it does run the train rather fine.

We found Viroschand alone in the Bombay section; he was lying on his side on the near lower berth, with his face hidden in the crook of his arm, so we stole on him quite unawares. He didn't see us till we were standing over him. When he did raise his head, the haggard eyes of the man nearly broke us up. Usually, a native's eyes show nothing to a Westerner, you look and see a wall, blank to all but the most superficial appeals to understanding or sympathy—nothing but a blank wall, with more often than not a hint of dark unfathomable recesses full of ancient antipathies and grudges, topped off with stubborn reticence and half-leashed scorn. Not so Viroschand. I never met another native like him, my heart went out to the appeal in his eyes as if he had been my own brother. He got up almost at once and we went onto the platform.

The Indian night was mysterious even in that ghastly modern station. Sheeted figures sleeping all over the platform, sublimely indifferent to the train that wasn't for them; fizzing arcs away up in the glass roof intensifying the vast black vault; a few ghostly passengers softly twittering at the carriage windows down the length of the train (it was not crowded); and near at hand (oh India!) two snake charmers amongst their

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flat baskets of cobras, quietly practising their weird flutings, long soft notes rising to a thin drawn-out sound, sustained till it hurt the brain. I have an eye for such details and all is burnt into my memory of our parting that night. It all seemed part of a spell, and I wasn't a bit surprised when Viroschand put a hand on each of our shoulders, and looking down at us, said, "Sahibs, I go to Phillipi"—and that seemed perfectly natural too. No Indian has ever put his hand on my shoulder before with any pleasure to myself, but that night our friend's hand seemed like an accolade. It is difficult to explain what I mean or to get even near it. I expect it was part of the Indian night, that half terror and half ecstasy that takes you by the throat without warning, and seems to dissolve solid things into fine significance of ages past or coming. Who can tell of the mystery of the Indian night? Not I, but I know something gripped me then as nothing ever has before or since. That common station dropped from around us, and then came a vision. I can't understand it and I know I will never make anyone else understand it. I could understand such a thing happening to Casmyth, he is Irish and temperamental, but why should it come to me, of all people? I can tell you for a fact that the train, platform, arcs, sleeping figures, water sellers, and all the common paraphernalia of that depot slipped off my plane of consciousness and left me standing at the gates of a great walled city, waving farewell to a prince who was setting out with a handful of men, leading a forlorn hope. I'm telling you it as it happened, there's no other way, I'd bungle it if I used a lot of fine words, and I say simply my prince seemed anxious for me to get boots, saddle, and horse and join him. It was all so clear. I could see the damascening on his tulwar blade as it flashed in the sun, and a great diamond flashed at his throat. He turned in the saddle as his

horse wheeled, and then he gave me a gay ironical salute, and was gone.

The whole thing could not have lasted more than a second, the guard slamming one of the near-by carriage doors shook me clear of it, and Viroschand jumped into his carriage and we were waving good-by to him as he smiled at us from the window of the moving train.

What was it? what was the secret of the Indian night with its sudden madness? I'm not going into any more details of that vision or whatever you may call it, but this I know, if ever I can get a bit of money and leisure here in New York, I'll go to an art school and learn to paint, and I swear I will produce the greatest picture of medieval India the world has ever seen, if perfection of detail is anything to the point.

What is the secret of Indian nights or days, too, for that matter? Is it something we have left behind or some power the Indians have we can't reach up to? I don't know, it's beyond me. I've never seen that famous rope-in-the-air trick or even the mango-tree one, but I believe they could both be done, after seeing that vision or "peep through the planes," or whatever it is called in the psychical jargon.

I need hardly say I never mentioned the thing to my friend, chiefly because I felt somehow that he, too, side-stepped this healthy plane of things-as-they-are, at the same time as I did. I have to write this book as the things happened and that visitation is an important part of a chain of incidents that led me to complete disaster, as you will see later, but I had no taste then for a lot of fine-drawn discussion about the inexplicable, and that's what it would have meant if I had broached the subject with Casmyth. I can't be certain of course about my friend, it may be he never saw my vision, but this much is certain, there was more than sorrow for Viroschand

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between us that night as we made our way back to the club.

We were astonishingly cheerful as we walked along the deserted streets, but it was a forced cheerfulness, the sort you see after a soldier's funeral, when the rifles are properly shouldered once more and the band is banging out a comic song to make quick-step back to friends and the canteen.

In our case the canteen was the club bar, and the good solid business men leaning against the mahogany. We whistled the quick-step ourselves and we made the time good and quick.

I remember it was ladies' night when we got back to the club, and the dance crowds were just arriving. All the cheerful lads of the village were there, and the usual sprinkling of senior partners and government officials, sweethearts and wives and other men's ditto also, as usual. There they were, the dear merry throng, fussing with gloves, programmes, cloaks and the rest of the trivial solemnities of such functions. The hall was packed as we pushed our way through to sanity and solid Western things. I would gladly have lingered in the hall a bit, the people seemed so sensible after that station affair. As it was, I nearly offered the Commissioner a cheroot in exchange for his curt nod of recognition. Casmyth is no dancing man, and detests the whole thing, but it took us an unusual time to get through that chattering crowd. We nipped through the billiard room and went on to the bar, and the noise and smoke that greeted us seemed to me as exhilarating as the opening chorus of a good musical show.

That was a good moment when I got my foot on the brass rail and propped my elbow on the mahogany. And I know it was so for my friend, too. But I'm hanged if we didn't both fall glum as two owls, after

our first *chota peg*. Back to that vision I swung, for all my efforts to shake it off.

I can't yet make up my mind whether or no Virochand exercised some sort of supernatural power over me when he put his hand on my shoulder. I dislike all such mysterious experiences intensely, because I don't think any good comes of them, no matter how near they get to actuality, and I like to shake off the slightest contact with such things at the earliest possible moment. Yet say what you will, India makes one queer despite the best of intentions. It has always been my idea that Indian inefficiency would get a good healthy jolt if you could stop all this mysticism. I suppose one should distinguish between occultism and mysticism, but the fact is in India they are never very far apart, and one comes to think and speak of them very loosely. Only another Gautama could separate them, I fancy. Originally, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the Indian Trinity, were as free from corroding superstition as the Christian Trinity is supposed to be. Now they are overlaid with *crores* (a *lahk* of *lahks*, a hundred thousand times a hundred thousand) of occult and mystic significances and subtleties. It can't be helped in India; I have felt the influence of it in my own life there, that mystic symbolism attaching itself to the slightest act or thought.

"I the Arian frustrate,  
by drinking in *three* sips."

That is a Western symbolism, the old Arian heresy exorcised. Typical of the Indian mentality, though. How can one help being influenced by the thing when 320 million people are at it all around you? I may be wrong of course, perhaps India has a great spiritual message that the average Westerner won't admit, or perhaps dare not admit, if any sort of rational business

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life is to be kept going in the country. My distaste for mysticism is very probably intensified by the accumulated instincts of hosts of ancestors who had to fight against it, for we have been in business in India since the days of the John Company. I have always kept aloof from the thing and discountenanced it wherever I could, and you can imagine my state of mind when I found that the wretched business was gripping me despite my habit of contempt toward it.

Irritation at what seemed mere weakness and mental flabbiness, helped me at last to shake free of the thing that night, and it was then I noticed Casmyth's state. He had three empty glasses in front of him and he was leaning on the bar, with his head in his hands. When I asked him what was the matter, he rounded on me and said, "Hell! I'm burning!"

Of course I thought he meant fever and said so. "Fever be blowed!" he rapped out, "I'm burning with shame—here we let old Viroschand in for a bankruptcy by losing his ship and we are a pair of damned smugglers and on top of that we've lost about a *lahk* of rupees when he needs every penny he can get to stave off ruin. I feel like throwing my master's ticket into the river and jumping after it." That was the first sign my friend made of the fact that he realized how we had abused Viroschand's confidence in us.

"Don't talk nonsense," I said, "how were you to blame?"

Casmyth threw out both his hands. "You heard Viroschand repeatedly ask us to wait a week, till we could get a skilled mechanic for the engine, and like a fool I thought he was only a machine-shy Indian."

"Well, what's a hundred thousand rupees to Viroschand?" I replied, "he's never known what he's worth since I've known him; a hundred *lahks* or a hundred *pice*, it's all one to him." I spoke like that to cheer my

friend up, but we both knew in our hearts that Viro-schand was facing ruin in grim earnest, and being what he was, it had the sting of death, and dishonor stinging beyond. The ordinary run of Marwari does make money just as I said, and really doesn't care much whether it's *lahk* or *pice*. He goes into business for the sake of the business itself, and goes broke with nonchalance born of familiarity with the situation. As a child of ten or even less he will be given a rupee by his father and told not to return until he has made it into two. That is the tradition for Marwaris from time immemorial and there is no appeal. The child invests the rupee in packets of pins, or buttons or some such thing and then he hustles to unload at the maximum profit in order to get another square meal at home. Often the child goes broke and creeps home after days of semi-starvation to receive a sound beating and a little bread and water. Then out he goes again with a rupee.

If his luck is in, the child returns this time with two rupees and the fatted calf is killed for him, and there is feasting and merriment to his heart's content for a week, and then out he goes, with two rupees to start.

This process goes on until the child is either out for good, and takes to other employment, a disgrace to his family, or else he is a substantial trader of some kind or other. This means that you sometimes find a young Marwari in business deals of a magnitude that would frighten the life out of a Westerner of equal age. It's a rotten system, to my mind; it makes irresponsible gamblers out of all of them, to a certain extent, and to a deplorable extent, in many cases. Going broke means nothing to them. But Viro-schand was not like that, as Casmyth and I both knew. He was brought up in that school, but he was never of it, and failure in business, flavored with a dash of dishonor, must have been a

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bitter cup for him to drink. He was no common Marwari though he lived all his life among such people, and it was the ceaseless contact with them that gave him that extraordinary look I have referred to, "Toiling after virtue, with all the breaks against him," as I once heard a witty American call it. I don't say I saw all this clearly then, I only saw bits at a time and the piecing together of the pattern came with my own sorrow and disaster. I suppose that is what bitter sorrow is for; it makes a man sober and reflective. If one could slip through life like those jolly society people one sees, so full of smiles and activities in newspapers, there would be no necessity to reflect, I imagine. Why bother to understand anything if you can give it all the slip by filling your life with easy trivialities? But how they get on your nerves, those shallow people; give me a man who has crashed "good and plenty," that's a friend to stick by you closer than a brother, and to go tiger-shooting with to boot. But I'm wandering a bit from the point, which is to make clear to you the fact that we were all in a desperate situation, our friend Viroschand was a whirlpool or maelstrom man-of-affairs and he was sucking us in by the force of his centrifugal probity, the activating property in the core of him. A common Marwari would have shucked the whole coil and let us out as easily. Not so Viroschand, he had to die by being torn in half, spiritually speaking, and as a crown of sorrow he had to witness the destruction of his dearest friends.

And why? Because he tried to be two men, or if you prefer it, a man of two opposing halves, Eastern half and Western half; that's better, for a double man seems to infer a two-faced character, and that is what Viroschand could not be.

It's difficult to explain even after the years have made it all so clear to me. I can see this, though, our

friend never had a chance to go straight, as Westerners understand the thing—not a fair chance that is—he was always getting tripped up by the codes of honor, particularly the rough, coarse Western code where financial success hog-ties blind justice at the final issue, and the scales and the sword are both cheated too frequently. I have not the skill or the time to give you a proper portrait of Viroschand. That would take chapters of digression from my narration of the facts as they actually occurred, and even then I am not sure that the man would be clearer to you than the image you can get of him by looking into the mirror of my mind, which is a mind like your own, comprehensibly Western in all its reflections. And the most even I can do is to flash occasional glimpses of Viroschand in his conflict with the coarsely practical Westernism he tried so enthusiastically to adopt, and which finally destroyed him. That is the best I can do; a portrait would seem to you like a hazy sketch on a dark bare canvas in a badly lit room, a nebulous unconvincing thing with neither background nor foreground.

So, as I say, I'm not going into the Indian half of the man, the fine-drawn, self-immolating casuistry that makes venial errors into gross crimes against spiritual intuition; it's all too subtle for me; I only know it was the other half of the man. I have to concentrate on the sinister situation all three of us had discovered as an overwhelming fact, plunging us into an abyss of helplessness and despair.

You can see us there in that club, sitting at one of the little polished black marble tables under the punka, for we had "come to anchor" as Casmyth flung away from the bar in an agony of remorse and bitter reflection.

I don't know how long we had been sitting there, brooding over impending disaster. Casmyth was

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slumped forward, head in hands, and elbows on the table; nothing very extraordinary about that, most men hold their heads so when a thing hits them badly, but what was extraordinary was the light on his face. Don't misunderstand me, it was nothing supernatural, only the reflection from the ceiling-lights striking up from the table. I remember it catching my eyes as I picked up my *peg* and took a drink. I moved my chair a little to the side at the time and forgot all about the matter. That was soon after we sat down.

The bar had quieted considerably as soon as the band struck up for the dancers, the noisy element departed, leaving the quiet old soaks and non-dancers like Casmyth and myself in peace. The noise had been quite grateful at first, but the quiet was more so, in our moody reaction; it was curiously peaceful, though I was only aware of the fact subconsciously; it was a musical peace, interwoven with the faint dance-music stealing downstairs from the ballroom. I recognized one tune after a time, it was very popular that season, at intervals, and this was evidently the interval, for I could see the white frocks of the women out on the lawn. It was an Arab sort of tune, you know the kind, mellow twitterings and flutings in infinite delicate variations of one simple theme, and then a fine-drawn sustained passage that rises and rises till it becomes like a quivering wire stretched across your brain. I suppose it got on my nerves a bit, for unconsciously I must have made an irritable gesture with my hand that knocked my glass onto the floor with a crash. I know I jumped up with a start, and Casmyth seemed to come out of a dream, slowly, as if he were dragging himself back to realities with difficulty. Then he staggered me by saying in the calmest manner in the world, "Let us get an aeroplane down from Dum Dum and go to Bombay, we can just do it in time."

"What are you talking about?" I said, "aeroplane—do what in time?—have you taken leave of your senses?"

It seemed he felt impelled to go after Viroschand, and that was the solution of the transport problem, that plane.

"So that is what you have been mooning about all this time," I said.

"No," he replied, "I was thinking about something quite different until you knocked that glass over." I knew pretty well what he had been going through, but I thought he might confirm my suspicions if I refrained from a direct challenge. I am practically certain that Viroschand had visited us again and that for some reason I escaped the direct contact of his power or influence or whatever it is. It may seem far-fetched to you, here in solid, sane America, but I tell you, the conclusion I jumped to the instant Casmyth dreamily proposed flying to Bombay, seemed little more than reasonable deduction there.

"Twice in a night," I thought to myself; "if this sort of thing is going on I will have softening of the brain." I turned my irritation full onto my friend. "Suppose we go into your suggestion like serious responsible people, what plane can we get and who is going to fly it, and what is it all going to cost?"

"As for cost, you needn't worry," he replied, "Redwin is up there, and I know he would come, if I sent him a wire, and take us, for the cost of the petrol." It was true, that madman was a friend of Casmyth's; the fellow could do anything with an aeroplane and would do everything a friend cared to put in words, particularly if it was risky. Redwin has since blazed the trail to Moscow via Samarkhand and Bohkara, though he never came back to tell the story of his flight. No one knows what became of him, the Bolshe-

viks got him, I suppose, and by gad they got a handful, too. Some messages came through, passed along by traders, months after we had given up all hope of hearing any news about him. I interrogated one of the caravans myself, and there can be no doubt of Redwin's arrival in Moscow. The very messages were redolent of the man, apart from a host of other details. But I am getting away from the point, which is that I had no use for flying-trips with such a pilot. That was my opinion at the time and that is my opinion now, and I told Casmyth I would rather swim the Hoogli than go up with Redwin again. He was a cheerful madman before he went to Scinde and everyone knows what "Scinde head" is. It's daylight moon-madness in a temperature of 110 or over, and the sanest may get it as badly as the most silly.

Well, we argued the matter back and forth, but I put my foot down, and told my friend that I had had enough of Redwin's madness in the Persian Gulf to last me a lifetime. I was as anxious to help Viroschand as he was, but I said that unless he could think of a more sensible way of doing it, I was going to have another *peg* and go to bed. That is what I said exactly, but the matter did not end there by any means. As a matter of fact, we had several *pegs* before we parted that evening for good. The last one was at Casmyth's bungalow, and we drank to a scheme that seemed to have all the elements of success in it. We never put that scheme into execution, the crash came before we got properly started, and dragged all three of us into the law courts. I wake up at night even now in a rotten sweat at the memory of the rack those Mohammedan lawyers kept us on for weeks. That killed Viroschand, coming on top of the Bombay debacle. The strange thing is the lawyers told us we could pull through with ease if only Viroschand would stick to the Indian side of his

case. You can imagine their anger when our friend went into court the first day and said he would forego his privilege in regard to an Indian jury. I am not going into all that here, it's too bitter still, although it happened so long ago. I am surprised now to think of the hope I felt as I bade Casmyth good night. I remember tucking my mosquito curtains round my bed, and muttering something about having hit upon the solution of our troubles, and rather dreamily thinking that for a plain business man I had had about enough of mystery, India and Viroschand.

## CHAPTER II

### PREPARATION OF THE "SHAH JEHAN"

You have probably come to the conclusion long before this that Viroschand was a very strange kind of Marwari, that is if you know anything about the East. You would be right, and yet I say he was a Marwari just the same, and just how strange he was will be most evident when you meet his sister, as we did in the middle of the Persian Gulf, after our ship got on fire and we had to take to the boats. We set out from Allahbunder in the *Shah Jehan*, as you know, on that hare-brained scheme of ours, with a ship full of empty bottles and unlimited enthusiasm. I was young then, not so much in years as spirit. I wish I were setting out from Allahbunder to-morrow, that is I wish I could turn the clock back so much, and have the buoyancy of heart and spirit that makes any scheme worth trying out, and takes the sting out of failure.

We had no thought of failure as we set off that morning, but by gad we soon had a stiff dose of it. Things began to go wrong soon after we had cast off everything fore, and, just holding on aft, were moving out to midstream under the tow of a crazy old steam-launch. We had decided not to wait for the mechanic Viroschand said he would get us for the auxiliary; Casmyth said it was so simple he would train a kalashi to look after it in a couple of days. Well, there we were, swinging the old boat's nose out into the stream, and the quaintest thing happened, a typical specimen of the thoughtfulness and inverted initiative of Indian ser-

vants. Above the chanties of the kalashis, the defective brayings of the steam-launch trying to whistle, and all the noise of the people on the dock, I thought I heard my butler's voice, and sure enough there he was trying to push his way through the crowd, waving a fair white napkin aloft and shouting "Sahib, Sahib, Varbthan Sahib." (This is the nearest he ever got to my name.) Anything might be in that napkin, from a telegram to a toenail, you never know in India. Of course we flung off our tow at once, and the launch pushed our nose back to the dock, until I was within speaking distance of Paimal Purshotam. As I live by bread, he had brought my old false teeth and a cracked monocle I had discarded, all wrapped up in a clean napkin which he was delicately holding up by the four corners.

A little thing like that is enough to trip a man up for life. You would hardly credit the consequences, remote and otherwise, that followed upon our putting back for my faithful servant with his damned napkin. In the first place (I ought to have told you before) we had been having a lot of trouble with the Babu customs official in that comic-opera port. The bottles, our staple cargo, went past him like smoke, but the bottling-plant and the printing-press and all the stores for the auxiliary, and particularly the ingredients for our fizzy water, were like honey to a bear, he couldn't keep his nose out of them, and he couldn't make up his mind what category they came under in his table of rates. He was an obese old nuisance, and a rapacious one, to boot. We simply arranged a booby trap for him when we could stand his prying no longer, got him out of the port by a telegram from the post-office and pushed off as I have said. After all our carefully laid plans, the sight of those teeth and the monocle was too much. The Babu was just behind Paimal, with his ledgers and tariff schedules under his arm and his pen

behind his ear. Casmyth and I rolled on the deck, we laughed till we rolled into the scuppers, helpless, but it was clear that the Babu wasn't going to let the contents of that napkin come on board until he had satisfied himself about the duty involved, in fact he was out for "Examination, Offeecial and Eeffeicient," and our trick of the early morning had braced him up to giddy heights of ruthlessness and determination. If ever you meet a Babu in that state, run for your life or you will die of exquisite mirth. We couldn't run, and when we had laughed ourselves out we realized that things were getting pretty serious, one way or another.

The butler's son, my cook, assistant-cook or maiti, the two hamals, and sundry chowkidars of casual employment, in fact, the bulk of the servants from our bungalow, were behind the Babu. It looked to me as if the Babu was reading the riot act to all who would listen and particularly to the butler, who steadfastly refused him permission to touch the napkin or its contents.

The rest of my servants seemed inclined to push the Babu into the water, and that would have been serious. Well, of course, we went ashore, giving the serang instructions to anchor about ten fathoms away from the dock. I wasn't going to have anybody on board if I could prevent it. Once that Babu started another prying and peering customs search, we might have been there for a week. The interminable arguments started all over again, the moment we put foot on the dock.

You must understand we had been nearly five weeks in that port, and had had five solid weeks of Babu stupidity. That was an awful place for a white man. We started at the local Taj Mahal Hotel, stuck it for a week, but eventually were driven by diarrhoea and general discomfort to take an empty bungalow and send for my servants, and some furniture. The furniture

never arrived, but some of the servants did, so we paddled on with hired stuff from the local bazaars. Weird and wonderful things they were, worth their weight in gold in New York I should say, but a poor substitute for a white man's usual comforts. The cook was the last to arrive, curse him. He was a Goanese, and put on airs before all the other servants about his alleged white (Portuguese) blood. He was as black as the ace of spades, and knew better than to try it on with me, but when he got my telegram to come to Allahbunder he knew he had me stone-cold. He declined, by telegram, at my expense, to come unless I paid for a maiti, a sort of assistant and personal servant combined. We had been without proper food for days, afraid to touch the native stuff, so I telegraphed the money for the maiti, fare, expenses, new outfit, and bakshish.. Do you blame me? he was a very good cook. Those servants had to come nearly two thousand miles, but if they had not we should have starved. It sounds absurd, here in New York, even to me, but it is a simple fact. It is a common saying in India that you will starve to death if you leave the line of your clubs, without a proper caravan and retinue. That is why the usual visitor never sees more than the fringe of India, and never can. Perhaps it is just as well, there would be too many deaths from apoplexy and suppressed racial superiority. That Babu, for instance, was enough to drive the average American mad and raving in ten minutes. A phlegmatic race can hold out against them better, and the everlasting "funny incident" of the Englishman stands him in good stead. He will tell you stories that last for hours and have no apparent point beyond a faithful recital of Babu stupidity; Americans couldn't stand that, any more than they could stand the exasperating dilatoriness of the native himself, particularly in office.

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In the native states the minor officials work in a way that performs marvels of unnecessary delay, for no apparent reason, too. I am still wondering where I got the idea that helped us at last to get those false teeth past the Babu. We looked like missing the tide in any case, until the owner of the ancient steam-launch had pushed his way through that stinking Custom House mob, to say that he had only coal enough for another hour's steam. He was a truculent Moham-medan of sorts, with a great knife stuck in his belt, and it was easy to see he was itching for a chance to draw it across that fat Gujerati Babu's neck. The trouble was that there was no tariff laid down for teeth and eyeglasses, and it was no use to say the articles had no taxable value (why did my servants run so swiftly after me if the articles had no value?). It was an impasse if ever there was one; we argued the matter up and we argued the matter down and we were worn out with trying to explain briefly in Gujerati that the monocle was a piece of personal attire. It was beyond the Babu, and at last Casmyth said it was also used in religious ceremonies. That is the only time I ever saw my butler laugh. Indians as a rule do not understand Western jokes or pretend they don't, so that laugh was as unexpected as it was awkward. It merely made the Babu more stubborn in his efforts to block our departure. We had paid through the nose for the bottling-plant, printing-press and all the other paraphernalia, in bribes, douceurs, "acknowledgment for services rendered or to be rendered," etc., etc. Every petty official in the place had a claim on us, and we paid, yes, every man jack of them, *privatim et serialim*, from the Chief of Police to the manager of the local Express Coy, through the Railway Superintendent and subordinate staff, the Law, Civil and Military, including the local Rajah's bodyguard.

We would not have paid another *pi*, if they had burnt us alive. The moment was ripe for the entry of that Mohammedan launch owner, he came just like the *deus ex machina* of old. The Babu shut up his ledger, and with one eye on the long knife and one eye on me, said that he would be satisfied with a written statement from me to the effect that the monocle was entirely for use in personal religious ceremonies (the old fox got a thrust in here), also, provided I would pay for the translation of same, into Kathiawari, and several other dialects, also postal charges to headquarters of said statements, also I must leave my private address, and the clearance was only provisional. It's my private belief the old scoundrel meant to reopen the whole clearance of our cargo again, and that he was only tricking us as we had tricked him in the early morning. The angry Mohammedan with the knife forced his hand a bit, that's all; he meant to send for the police while we were struggling with the written statement. You must remember that all this took place in a dialect of Gujarati, not like the Gujarati of Cambay, and we had had only five weeks' practice at it. That letter might have taken an hour to write or more. We gave it up in ten minutes and agreed on a further charge for translating same from English into Gujarati (local brand).

Well, at last that fatuous letter was finished, all the fees checked, counter-checked, adjusted in *annas* and *pice* and finally paid, and we all trooped out of that fetid Custom House, and down to the quay.

You can imagine the rabble that had collected by this time. There was a fair sprinkling of Mohammedan sailors in the mob, and as usual a good deal of jostling between them and the Hindus, and some of it came our way as we forced a path to the head of the procession. It was annoying but impossible to notice, if we were to catch the tide. The Babu was following

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close behind us, and as we turned the corner round some ramshackle sheds that hid our ship, I noticed he was smiling to himself very happily. I thought, "The old villain is chuckling to himself about all those extra translation fees, confound him," and then I caught sight of the masts of our ship. I fairly ran the rest of the way, with Casmyth just ahead of me. If we were to get off the mud it was a question of seconds not minutes.

Of course the rabble chased after us, shouting their filthy songs

"Bibi kiwasti  
Mar amara  
Bibi kiwasti  
Atcha Atcha" etc.

and they were in full cry when we did get to the dock opposite our ship. We were too late, her heel was well on the mud and there we must stick for another twelve hours in that steaming port. I am fairly well innured to the vicissitudes of Indian affairs, but the sight of that ship heeling over nearly broke me up. I felt worn out with worry and weakness. That first spell of bad food at the hotel, with no mosquito curtains worth a rap, and the continual fear of a bad bout of fever, or something worse, had pulled me down, and I could have cried with vexation and disappointment on the dock. Of course, I did nothing of the sort, but the effort to suppress my irritation nearly broke my blood-vessels. That is no climate to get angry in I assure you.

We were stuck, the ship on the mud, in front, and the rabble, behind. It seemed ridiculous to go on board, and fry on a careening ship and it seemed ridiculous to stay on the dock. That crafty old Babu of the Customs had completely outwitted us. We were at his mercy now.

The day was getting hot, the morning breeze had

faded out, and there was that brassy look and taste in the atmosphere that indicates another spell of the monsoon rains. There would not be a breath of wind till it started to pour, and the oppressive air was scarcely breathable. The stink of the filthy rabble around us was intolerable. They were working themselves up into a state of frenzy with ribald improvisations at our expense, and the crowd was getting bigger every minute, even the sailors on the dhows climbed up to the tops of their raking booms to get a peep at the excitement on the quay (there is a twenty-foot tide there on that coast). Every moment, I expected the riff-raff from the town to come along the spit that joins the docks with the town on the mainland, and then the fat would be in the fire. I kept my eyes glued on that spit of land, while Casmyth hurriedly reviewed our situation.

It was just at this point that some one hit me on the brim of my topee, and knocked it off my head. That was a violent blow, delivered with intention, and was meant for my head. My hat saved me, but the chin-strap broke and the hat went into the muddy water below my feet in the harbor.

That blow was as bracing as a strong whiskey-and-soda. I forgot all my childish irritation, and charged into the brown of that mob like a berserker with bare hands. I heard a smack like a pistol-shot at my side and caught a half-glimpse of Casmyth dealing a flat hander to the nearest native's cheek.

"Make for the railway siding," he shouted, charging after me into the mob. They seemed to be falling down like ninepins, almost before I touched them—the cowardly black devils, but I found my knuckles all bruised and bleeding when at last we slammed the door behind us of an empty carriage standing on that siding.

Left to myself, I believe I should have charged that

mob till I was knifed from behind or stoned to death, but Casmyth got a hand under my belt and dragged me toward the siding, fighting sideways through that awful rabble. He says he did this, but I do not remember any such kindly influence, till we were on the far side of the mob. Previous to that scramble, I had only knocked three men down in my life, and curiously they were all ear-punches. Casmyth says the rabble went down in swathes like cut corn, so ear-punching must be my instinctive method of fighting. I have never carried a weapon in India, though I always left a loaded revolver with my wife when I went on trips up country. That was of course many years before all this happened. I am very thankful now for that habit of going unarmed; that day by the docks at Allahbunder would have seen murder a-plenty if I had had the necessary weapon.

Some one in the crowd had a gun, or got one soon after we made the siding, for several bullets struck the carriage. We were safe for the moment, however, for the carriage was a steel cattle-truck and it was unlikely that rifles would be used. We might suffer a great deal from heat but that was unavoidable. We started to clean the dust off the wire-gauze grilles that serve for ventilators on the desert trains, so that we could see what was coming next and also to get a little fresh air. When we were clearing the wires I told Casmyth that some damned *pairwala* had knocked my hat off into the water.

"No need to go into details, friend," he replied, "it's been coming for days, that's why I pushed off without the mechanic this morning. That bandage I wore on my hand last week wasn't got by cranking the auxiliary as I said, and the crew haven't been on shore for three days, for a similar reason.

"I haven't spoken to you about this before, as I

thought you were a bit run down and edgy, but it must be faced now; we are in a bad hole, the town rabble will be here any minute now, if they have not already arrived, and those country wallahs (dhows) will be down the river at first flood, and our crew will skedaddle if they aren't murdered first.

"We can't get on board the ship with anything short of a rocket apparatus now, my bearer is on board and all your servants have skipped, I saw them streaking for the town the minute you knocked your first swathe down, and I don't blame them. We have only one chance, and that is to get to the station telegraph-office when it gets dark, and hold up the clerk till he puts a message through to Viroschand in Bombay or Calcutta, or both. The nearest political officer is in Karachi, I suppose, and that's 500 miles, by sea, and you can't go across Kutch, by land. If Viroschand is still in Bombay we may pull through, if not, we're done."

He was right. That was the only thing left for us to do. It was full afternoon by this time, the heat was intense, and the humidity was excessive, as it usually is during breaks of the monsoon. The steam of the last downpour was rising all along the embankment like a thin fog. Over on the far side of the harbor by the mangrove swamp it seemed like a mirage, twisting and writhing in fantastic forms and shapes. In the crescent of the town beach between, the reflections of the livid gray and fawn temples made a veritable mirage in the molten silver of the viscid sea. Everything was the color of scorpions in that light, with dark patches where the monsoon rain had brought up some rank grass.

I never knew whether the temples were built of stone or mud, we were always too tired or sick at the end of the day to make the journey, although there was a ramshackle tram along the ridge of sand and mud that joined the harbor to the mainland. Besides,

it nearly always poured in the evening and we were glad to get to the bungalow, out of the mud and rain, and to stay there till bedtime. Be it also remembered that I had the log to keep up in the evenings, with a view to my future duties as second in command at sea.

After those few shots at our truck the mob swept on past us, making a stand at the Custom House for a bit and then, apparently absorbed in their own affairs, seemed to concentrate on an internal fight amongst themselves.

"Casmyth," I said, "they are going to get some rifles or big native guns to shoot us up out of this."

"I don't think so," he replied, "they seem too absorbed in keeping in two parties, to do anything together."

They all disappeared in the direction of the town, one party leading sometimes and the other taking its place as the fighting swayed the whole mass about.

When they finally disappeared in the purlieus of the town at the end of the spit, the stillness seemed to become sinister in its oppressiveness. The sky was rapidly darkening, great black banks of cloud rushing up out of the sou'west, and it was only a question of minutes before the sun would be completely blotted out. It would be dark in an hour, and pitch-dark in two, but we decided to start in the rain, if that came first. In that rain you can see only a few feet ahead. We got ready to go.

There were a few straggling clumps of toddy-palms on the spit, soon they began to bend over and their top-knots to stream out in the wind. The rain came down with a crash. We jumped down on to the ballast at once and started along the railway track running parallel with the spit of sand. The track was built on its own ballast and acted as a breakwater to the roadway. We had not gone sixty yards before the rain eased off,

and looked like stopping altogether. You must remember we had to fight every foot of that sixty yards against the wind and rain. We were close to the corner of the Custom House when the lull came, though we did not know that, till too late. No going back now, nothing to do but run for it. They could pepper us as easily from the House, whichever way we ran. May I never have another run like that. The seaward side of the embankment ran down into thick mangrove bushes at the water's edge, and there was a foul ditch on the other side, both full of snakes, mostly the water variety, which are all deadly. I don't remember being much worried by the snakes; we took them in our stride, as they came into view, scuttling for the water on either hand. That run was a steeplechase. The last part had to be done on the ballast, at the top of the embankment, for the level of the rails was getting low, nearly down to the level of the ditch-water on the landward side.

We were then in full view of the town outskirts. My throat and tongue swelled with funk and I don't mind owning to it. I could scarcely breathe for apprehension. There was always the chance that the mob or part of it was waiting near the station, at the town end of the spit, but having come so far, we had to risk that encounter. Well, there was no one at the station. I supposed then they all wanted knives and lathis and had gone to their houses to get them. The station was completely deserted. There was neither staff nor mob in or near the station.

We got bold after creeping around a bit, practically on all fours. We searched the waiting-rooms first, such as they were, and then forced the shutters of the superintendent's office (the door was locked).

There was nothing there but cheroot ends, betel spit and dirty papers on the floor and tables and chairs. No sign of a telegraph. We never did find that telegraph

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ticker, though we searched high and low. My idea is that the only telegraph office was in the post-office in the town nearby and that messengers were sent to the station as occasion arose, which would be about once per day, at the most. Such arrangements are common enough in India.

There was one good thing we found in the office, and that was a dripping earthen chattie, full of cool water, hanging in the draft of the shutters. We had a good long cool drink and felt much stronger for it.

For all practical purposes, we were worse off now than in the wagon. Something had to be done and that very quickly. We had already begun to wonder why the mob was not on its way to us. They must have seen us for most of the last burst along the embankment. What were they up to, anyway? That deserted station seemed like a death-trap, and every moment in it like those at the foot of a gallows.

While we anxiously debated our next move, in the office of the superintendent, the rain came down with a roar, and the temple bells all began to ring simultaneously. In less than a minute everything was blotted out to sound and sight by the rain.

"Saved again," said Casmyth. "For the moment, you mean," I replied. "We've still got six hours to wait before the *Shah Jehan* is afloat, and then we have to get on board, with the chance that the crew are all scuppered when we get there."

"If ever I get on the ship again, I promise you I will get you to sea somehow, if I have to con the ship and mind the auxiliary at the same time. I never expected to live till the tide flowed again." So said that bold sailor.

"Talk sense, man," I replied, "it's all of two miles to the river mouth, with fast flood, a totally unknown channel, and wind and rain to beat Tophet." I had

to shout by this time to make myself heard above the roar of the rain.

The conceit of that sailor! the prospect of getting aboard a ship again seemed to him like the keys of Heaven in his hand. All sailors are alike in that respect, put them on board a ship and they think they can pull the stars out of heaven to get them out of a difficulty. In a way, I suppose, that is just what they aim at, metaphorically speaking. They are in the habit of pulling out of so many desperate situations that they must come to believe in lucky stars and so forth. They combine faith with works in a remarkable degree; certainly Casmyth did, or he could never have brought us in an open boat straight to Ras Jebah, all of one hundred miles, and much of it by starlight. But I am getting ahead of my story.

Well, to go back, I felt properly up a gum-tree, sweating in that ramshackle station, with the roar of the rain driving one scranny like an intense barrage of heavy shell. Soon the water in the tracks was over a foot deep and rapidly rising to the level of the platforms; we could have floated out of that station right down to the *Shah Jehan* if we had had a canoe, always provided we were not swamped in the first five minutes by the rain. I mentioned the idea to Casmyth and we both laughed at the conceit.

"Let it come down, anyway," I said, "it will at least damp the ardor of that bloodthirsty crew in the town."

"There's another reason to be thankful," said my friend, "this will make a fine old ebb, coming down the harbor, and will take us out in great style; no chance of going on a mud-bank, we have only to keep in the middle to get to sea." There was a lot of comfort in that.

It was pitch-dark by this time, and our excitement about the danger from the natives had died down some-

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what, though we still had over several hours to get through before we could think of leaving the station. We went into one of the waiting-rooms and talked out our situation, and eventually had the comfort of a definite plan of action, to keep our minds occupied. A chill had come with the dark, and the action was welcome exercise, too, for our clothes were sopping-wet. We decided to make a waiting-room a fortress, with a secret exit, to be used when the moment came to break for the ship. The assumption was that the mob would return at the first definite break in the rain. We had to time our departure, to get us to the boat at the same time as she floated. It was useless to go before and it was dangerous to wait longer. We had to take a chance on the country wallahs getting there in force before us, but it was all chance anyway, so we put that risk out of our minds and set to work to fortify the waiting-room we had selected as our stronghold. First we barricaded the door and left a little sally-port near the floor to creep through, in case our plan went wrong at the far end. Our fort was the last waiting-room on the side of the station farthest from the embankment we had come by. The room had a row of little windows high up at the ceiling level, just above the top bar of the punka. They were the usual vents for the escape of the lower hot air the punka sweeps up. The point in our case was that these windows were also on a level with the lower beams of the station roof, or, rather, near enough for a good spring to let you get a grip on the big beams. It is necessary to point out that the rooms in that climate are at least twice as high as American rooms of a similar kind—the idea being to shut up the room during the worst heat of the day and use the air in the upper half of the room. A stuffy idea, but anything is worth trying in that furnace of a climate. It seems to work more or less, for I have noticed a

distinct difference in the temperature inside such rooms during the worst hours of the day.

The basic idea of our scheme was to get the natives over to our side of the station and keep them there by stratagem while we slipped out of the upper windows, along the station roof-beams, over the heads of the excited mob, in the dark, and thence to the embankment.

The weak point of our scheme was that our enemies might come too soon (the monsoon might let up at any moment, as we had already discovered in the afternoon), the tail of the monsoon is liable to be a little erratic sometimes, and then our barricade would not hold long enough to let us get away.

Of the lower windows we had no fear, they were heavily barred on the yard side of the station (to prevent free rides on the trains, I must suppose), and we only had to keep in the dark to ensure safety from attacks on that side.

Time was the essential part of our scheme. We busied ourselves with the collection of every conceivable kind of missile for our barrage—lamps, tins, basins, water-chatties, books, boxes, bags, every portable and sizable thing in the station, in fact. When everything was piled inside our fort, we arranged a booby-trap, with strings leading out through the upper window, so that we could let it off, after we had departed along the beams of the roof-truss, to delude the mob into thinking we were still inside the room. There was a chance that some of the mob might be on the embankment side of the station but we trusted to the natives' love of noise and bobbery to attract and collect them where we wanted them. We searched the place for anything that would make a light, and abolished it. Darkness was also essential to our scheme, of course. We badly needed a good rope, to make a ladder to reach the upper win-

dows, a strong knotted cord, which we could draw up after us, would have sufficed, but there was no such thing to be found in the station. We had to be content with a pile of chairs, boxes and tables, so arranged that we could push the lot over, once we had gained the roof outside. This had the advantage that it would make the mob think we were still in the room, and we trusted to our booby-trap to hold them till we were well over their heads.

We then went over the roof-beams to the far side of the station, and found there was a drop of about twenty feet to the ground. This had to be got over somehow, so we cut away all the punka cords in the various rooms of the station, and knotted them together. They were all rotten, like everything else in India that is not under the constant supervision of a white man, but it was the best we could do. We threw a lot of sacks down, to break a fall in case the cords broke under one of us, and then we gave our faces, hands and knees a good coat of dirt and oil. We were dressed in the usual khaki shorts and shirt of the tropics, and these we also liberally begrimed by rubbing them on the sooty beams of the station roof.

It took a good hour and a half to get everything in train, and we were in deadly fear lest some wretched native would crawl in out of the storm before our preparations were complete. We were "whacked to the wide" when our plans were all in order; hunger, fatigue and anxiety had made up that day from the earliest hours of the morning, and there was nothing in the station but water. When we were satisfied that we could do nothing more, we went into the waiting-room and barricaded the door. It was no use keeping a lookout, the rain was coming down in solid masses, blocking the view at a yard and preventing the distinction of all sounds.

Several hours to go yet. No harm in having a smoke, and weak though we were with hunger and fatigue, the moment that match was struck, we both laughed at the sight of each other till the tears streamed down our grimy faces. That laugh did us both good, though we had to climb to the roof again, to make up our camouflaged complexions.

I suppose we had been sitting in that waiting-room about a couple of hours when the alarm came. I was on the platform side of the room, and Casmyth was on the station-yard side, at the lower windows. A high wind had got up, increasing the deafening din outside, yet despite the din I thought I heard a cough, just outside our barricaded door. The door was the usual *purdah* type; that is, knee-high at the bottom and about a foot higher than head-height at the top, spaces filled in with our barricade of course, except a slit I had left on purpose for a peephole, at the bottom near the floor. It was no use going off at half cock, so I did not warn Casmyth till I had made sure through my peephole. I could hear the sweat dropping off my chin on to the floor as I lay with my eye glued to that crack in our barricade. Suddenly I saw a light show up a row of toenails, and then another row—"They're here!" I yelled, and Casmyth was at my side in one bound.

## CHAPTER III

### VOYAGE TO THE GULF OF OMAN

As Casmyth reached my side, I heaved the first volley of lamps and water-jars through the barricade and over the doors. Above the storm we heard a howl like a wounded panther, and we immediately heaved another volley through the barricade, and then the roar of the storm drowned everything in an ear-splitting waterspout that seemed to beat the roof down on our heads. It was impossible to tell what was going on outside, and we did not care—we were too worked up for that—we had only about another twenty minutes to wait, and then we could take to the roof, and dash across that embankment, to the ship.

We shouted and swore till our throats cracked; I heard Casmyth shout, "By the grace of God, we'll make a battle of this," and we heaved the stuff over the barricade till our arms ached. There was no point in sparing noise or ammunition, as it was our plan to hold the natives on that side of the station. We had plenty of ammunition, the plan was working out on schedule time, and with a sign to Casmyth, I gathered the last handful of missiles, let fly, and jumped for the piled tables reaching to the ceiling window. I was up in a second, Casmyth steadying the bottom lot. As I crawled through the window, I nearly put my hand on a face just outside! There was no time to think, I grabbed where I thought the throat might be, and a hoarse whisper came out of it, saying: "*Sahib!—asti, Sahib!*"—it was our serang from the ship!

From the shelter of the anchor-house hole, it seemed he had watched us leave the railway wagon (the rest of the kalashis were hiding in the fo'c'sle, and he could not make one of them budge out after that shooting started), and as soon as there was enough water to float a plank, he paddled himself to the quay through the deluge and clambered along the embankment to the station.

He said that after that he only came into the station to rest a moment and smoke a cigarette (more likely to fish out his opium box and take a chew), and while searching the windy station for a place to strike a match, he noticed the barricaded waiting-room doors. It was a puzzle to the old man,—Who was in the waiting-room? friends or foes? He had no way of telling.

He waited some time ("half-past das minit, Sahib"—which may mean just over ten minutes, or half an hour and ten minutes, it's impossible to tell; they have no exact measurement of time, for personal use, though they can keep appointments if the hour is marked on a watch for them), then, shivering in his wet clothes in the hurricane blowing through the station, he could not help coughing, though he was quite near the door.

Having given himself away, he thought he would have one peep over the door and was going to climb up; that was when I saw his feet and our first volley frightened that howl out of him.

He was a very clever old man, that serang, for immediately he heard our shouts, he set about finding some way of getting to us inside the room.

His sailor's eye had caught sight of the strings in the window almost as soon as he got to the station, and he was as active as a monkey, so it was no great difficulty for him to get into the roof and work his way, hand over hand, along the timbers till he came to the window

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and the strings. The rest you know already. He told us all this the first day out in the Gulf.

The rain was still coming down in a deluge, but the wind had moderated considerably when we climbed over our barricade and made our way to the embankment. *It was quite dark and we had little fear, once we got through the flood pouring over the first post line. We carried the little serang on our backs by turns; the first ahead felt for the rail, on hands and knees, with the water up to his elbows, and the pick-a-back pair came step by step after. It was like walking into a vast lake—the first part—a terrifying experience, but it had to be done.*

Every step through the flood made the chance of pursuit more remote, and it was well worth cut knees to feel that assurance.

As soon as we reached the higher part of the embankment above the flood we dropped the serang, and all bolted for the ship, and the serang wasn't more than a yard behind us at the quay. The ship was invisible in the black night and rain, no lights were showing and it was impossible, with the splashing of the deluge in the harbor, to make anyone aboard hear.

The only thing to do was for one of us to set off on the serang's plank, tied to a rope, and to paddle about in the general direction of the ship till it was found.

Casmyth tried it first and I paid out the rope of sorts found knocking about the quay, when we had pieced enough together to make two cables-length.

After what seemed an eternity, I felt the rope pulling strongly on my hands and I thought Casmyth had found the ship and was signaling to us to haul the plank. I hauled and the serang hauled, and we soon had the plank and Casmyth back at the quay. He could not find the ship, and had come back because he was exhausted. I was angry with my friend; it seemed such

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a small thing for an experienced sailor to do, but he was whacked to the wide, so I kept my tongue between my teeth.

There was nothing for it but for me to try. The *serang* wanted to come too, saying he knew exactly the position of the ship, but I did not care to let *Casmyth* handle the rope alone in his exhausted state, so I set off on the plank by myself.

Well, there was no ship. It was gone. I suppose the *laskars* had got the anchors up as soon as the *Shah Jehan* floated. I can't say I blame them much; their *sahibs* gone, their *serang* gone, and a town full of angry foreigners behind them. Our *laskars* or *kalashis* were all Straits Settlement men, except the *serang*, who came from Rangoon way. The anger of the sea was nothing to them compared with the unthinkable dangers that might come out of the town.

We learned after that they had warped the ship to the quay by floating a cable ashore on a raft of planks and hatches, and then worked the ship along the edge of the quay with boat-hooks and poles, till they got to the mouth of the harbor. There the river current had caught them and floated them quietly out to sea just as *Casmyth* had prophesied it would. He said afterwards that it was a two-to-one chance that the ship did not ground in the mouth of the harbor at one side—but ignorance is as good as nerve sometimes. To get an idea of the state of our feelings when I returned to the quay, worn out with exhaustion, and numb to the bone from immersion in the water—(I had to lie full-length on that plank in order to get any way on it against the driving rain and wind)—you must remember that we were still haunted by the fear of the mob returning. We had had no food since early morning, and all we had been through that horrible day, left us with a delirium like that of a violent fever.

It was the serang who gave us the idea by which we eventually escaped from that ghastly port. My brain was as numb as my body, and Casmyth was violently sick, and had to be laid full length on the quay. He had swallowed a lot of muddy harbor water before he found the right way of managing the plank.

After I came back from an unsuccessful search in the Custom House for a drink for Casmyth, the serang tackled me. He was holding Casmyth's head as the retching came on again.

"*Pani mungta, Sahib? launch kidder hai?*" he said. And "*Kihirwasti launch mungta,*" I said; and as soon as he replied, "*Pani hai, Sahib,*" something clicked in my brain and I knew we had a chance. The launch might be a wash-out (as a matter of fact we never tried it)—but there were dhows up the creek with their crews asleep. No country wallah keeps a watch, even at sea, when they usually tie up the helm, turning in to a man.

As soon as my friend could stand, I took one arm and the serang the other, and we half-carried and half-walked him in the direction of the Custom House. The rain had eased off considerably, and there was a certain lightness in the sky. Some pariah dogs were prowling about the sheds, near the Custom House, and it struck me they were after food.

If only we could get one into the Custom House and watch him sniff around the cases, it would be worth while breaking it open to see if it contained food.

I laid Casmyth down on a heap of sacks and started to chase a pie-dog (same as pariah) into the Custom House. Only those who have lived in the East can appreciate the distasteful nature of this job. A bite from a pie-dog might lead to almost any horrible death, from cholera to plague; they feed on garbage chiefly, and don't scruple to eat a corpse. Low-caste Indians, like sweepers, and not always those in native states, simply

throw the dead body of a person who dies from such diseases into a field and leave it. This relieves them of the necessity of reporting the matter to a medical authority. The whole family may be infected and in the incubatory stage, but just the same they leave the town and move off to a relative in the country, infecting the whole of the villages on the way, and that's how epidemics start in India.

Well, that dog had to be chased into the Custom House. The serang did not understand why, but saw what I was up to, and though a dog was an unclean animal to him, its very proximity pollution, he helped me.

We ran and stumbled after those dogs for half an hour with a loop of rope, and the harder we ran, the harder the pies ran. It was a silly idea in any case, and we had to give it up, and return to Casmyth. We found him dozing full-length on the pile of sacks, and a pie-dog was scratching and sniffing at these very sacks.

They were rice sacks. Casmyth was awake and scooping rice out of those sacks in no time. Some of the sacks had as much as a couple of handfuls in them, and one sack had several pounds. After nearly an hour's work in the dark we had a good half-sack-full and we set off for the creek.

The task of getting a dhow was so simple, it seems hardly worth describing. We simply crept on board the first that was tied up by itself at the edge of the creek, found it empty and the water-jars full, poled out into the creek, clawed our way along the harbor quays and were soon in the river, floating quickly down toward the sea. My friend and I fell asleep on the deck almost as soon as we passed the harbor mouth. We were awakened by the serang offering us a tin full of hot boiled rice. It was broad daylight, half the lateen-sail was set, and we were far out to sea. That rice was

a good sight, but best of all was the sight of the schooner's masts, like pins on the horizon, dead-ahead of us. It was impossible to say whether they saw us, but as they had no sail on the ship, we stood a first-class chance of catching her. We quickly set the rest of the canvas on the dhow and were soon bowling along before the morning breeze off the land.

The charcoal brazier, which the serang had found still alight, was soon blown up and we had some more hot rice. Casmyth brought up the first lot he ate, but the second stayed with him. He was still very weak and ill, and went to sleep again as soon as he felt the benefit of the rice and the warmth of the sun.

We caught up with the schooner before the heat of the day set in. In those shallow seas it was easy to anchor the dhow with a spare coir hawser we had in the schooner, and then we left her to her fate. I hadn't a doubt the natives would soon be out after both us and the dhow. After our treatment by the natives I did not care much about the fate of the dhow, but I was puzzled to know why they had not come after us long before. Casmyth was too seedy to discuss it and went below to his bunk and a strong tot of brandy, as soon as he was hauled on board the *Shah Jehan*.

It was long after we got back to Calcutta that I read a report in an old paper about the Moslem-Hindu riots that broke out in Allahbunder on that ghastly day we started up the Gulf. It must have begun whilst we were shut up in that cattle wagon. Of course that accounted for everything, the sudden flight from the town, the temple bells all starting, the deserted station, and the deserted dhows in the creek at the head of the harbor. The report in the paper only gave the name of the place, date, and approximate deaths in the riot, as usual—for no one can ever get exact figures about a religious riot in India—it was the date that was inter-

esting to me. I was looking for the shipping list, to check up the dates of some old consignments, when the name Allahbunder caught my eye.

There were eight Mohammedans and twelve Hindus killed, the report said; that means twice as many subsequent deaths from wounds and improper treatment. After such an event the wounded crawl or are dragged to their homes and no doctor ever gets a chance to help them. Moslems are not going to tell tales on Hindus, they think themselves quite capable of rolling up all the Hindus in India without making a song about it. I daresay they are right—they have guts enough for the job—but as they are generally outnumbered by about fifty to one, they don't "get anywhere."

The Hindus survey their swarming millions (about 300 million) and look forward to the next slashing and bashing affray.

The English look rather bored and make pleasant little jokes about the "Church Militant."

It is quite impossible to say what started that particular riot at Allahbunder; anything will start these things off, the most trifling accident is enough—a Moslem shoe on a naked Hindu foot in the crowd—then, "cow-eater," from the Hindu, and "snake-worshiper," from the Moslem, and the show is started.

We saw one party chasing the other, from the grating of the railway wagon, but which was leading is scarcely worth bothering about. The main point is that they were both too much interested in their private "Donnybrook" to think about us. What a sight that would have been, that fighting in the rain, with the maddened mobs rushing from temple to temple down the narrow streets! Impossible for a white man to go near it of course, that's why the thing has never been properly described.

It happens nearly every day in India, and I have

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never yet seen a reasonable cause given for the start. Usually the reason is something to do with a Hindu cow, or Moslems playing their bands too noisily in a wedding march when they happen to pass a Hindu temple. (They are great musical festivals, those Moslem weddings, the brass-bands play the same tune, part of an American coon-song for choice, for seven days and nights, without stopping except for a little food and sleep.)

Such beastly noise is exasperating to a Hindu ear beyond all possible description. Hindu music is frequently so delicate in its expression that a gross Western ear can't hear it at all! I don't mean to say I understand anything about such things; Casmyth told me this and a lot more about having extra intervals in their musical scale, and so on. He is quite a musician and could sketch and paint as well as most professional artists in my opinion. If only I had kept a few of those he did on our disastrous Gulf expedition! they would be worth all the feeble writing I labor over these nights.

He could make you see a whole town of temples and palms at the edge of the Indian surf as clearly as those engravings you see round the edge of charts, and all with a few pencil dashes and dots. He must have done dozens on that Gulf trip and at Goa and Bijapore.

I was thinking, as I sat in my little apartment, overlooking the "L," where I can catch a glimpse of the blue and silver from the East River (the low boom of a ship's siren turned my thoughts to him, I suppose)—what a fortune we could have made with those sketches properly framed and glazed, and a good publicity man writing up the show! Romance, people seem to thirst for it in this town! People say that Americans think of nothing but money, but it is not true; if they understood America they would see that money is chiefly necessary to make the country develop

into the lovely place that Americans mean it to be eventually.

It's the same with American manners; you will get more real courtesy and consideration from New York men than anyone in the world, if they have time for it, but they frequently haven't got the time. How can they have much time for such things, when every minute has to sweat out sixty seconds of profitable employment?

As for the women of America, there is nothing they won't do or suffer to enhance their poor beauty. I've known types of most of the women in the world, but they are silly amateurs at displaying their charms, beside the average American woman. Heavens above! think of the thousands of smart little burning feet tripping around the offices and pavements of New York every hot summer day! The Venetian women think they can get away with the highest heels that ever finished a shapely leg, but they would grind their teeth with impotent fury if they walked down Fifth Avenue any day about five o'clock.

The most amazing thing is the naïve unconscious modesty that goes with such dashing fashions; you can walk from end to end of New York and never know the color of a woman's eyes. *Oh, mon Paris, mon beau Paris!*

You will hear another version of these things from those people who don't fit into the country, the sort who can't or won't help to make the money America needs for her proper development. They are never tired of prophesying assorted disasters for America; such people get pushed out of the ranks pretty quickly, there's no room for them in an army that has to fight every inch of its way to national happiness.

Well, I must get back to the schooner and the troubles that started almost as soon as we got on board

and anchored that dhow on a shoal. Before going below, Casmyth had said there would be nothing but light breezes till evening, but I was to wake him up at the first sign of clouds banking in the sou'west; meantime I might set sail fore and aft, and lay on a course as near N.W. by W. as the fitful wind would let me. It was our intention to hit off Jaskar, which is about four hundred miles up the Gulf from Karachi, and to cable Viroschand "all well," from there. There was sense in that, for we would have the tail of the monsoon to blow us along with a cargo, and we reckoned on creeping back along the coast (reducing our load all the time) with the auxiliary, to Karachi, where we could pick up more petrol for the rest of the journey back to Mandevi or Dwazka, and so back by way of Devibandar and Cambay.

The first sign of trouble was the "hanging on the slack" of the crew as our serang started to make sail. Usually they skip about like performing fleas, at the lightest word of a serang, but these fellows seemed determined to do as little as they could, and that pretty slowly.

We were still in sight of land, and I was anxious to get clear away from it, for reasons I've given and need not go over again. The way those laskars heaved on the mizzen hoist would have given a snail a pain, so I laid on to the tally myself.

I thought they only wanted a little encouragement or were perhaps unused to the gear; the little serang and I heaved like six men, and I shouted "rouse her up, my lads, *tano pucker*o," but it did not seem to make much difference. It was the same with the mainsail, and the fore-sheets and the topsails, and I was sick of the sullen little thread-paper chaps.

When things were drawing a little and the serang was at the wheel, I thought I would have a talk with

him about the men. The whole thing might be explained by the fact that he was a Burman and the crew were all Straits Settlement men; this might be a reason for their defection the night before. No laskar crew would slope off and leave their serang in the lurch if he were one of themselves. He would know the district they came from, perhaps even their village and relatives, and they would not give trouble to a man who could make their rare home-going a misery.

As it was, the serang was nearly as much a foreigner to the crew as myself, and I saw half my dog-watches "going west" till we could get back to Karachi and replace either the crew or the serang.

It is difficult to make clear to a Western mind how such racial prejudices and peculiarities trip one up in the East, but they do, and for a long time I held this racial difference to be the reason of the crew's defection.

I once promoted a coolie to be a hamal (he was one of the nicest Hindus I ever met, and as handsome as a brown Greek god), the household buzzed round my ears in a week, and the cook vamped up a story about an attempted rape on his wife, that was merely a pack of lies to get the poor boy into trouble.

These things have to be taken Eastern fashion—that is, seriously.

In the present case, everything connected with the working of the ship was done so grudgingly and in so slovenly a manner that, for all practical purposes, we might have had no serang at all. To this day I believe the crew had something to do with those leaking drums of petrol, though exactly what, I cannot say. There was no lock on the storeroom door, and there was nothing to prevent some of the crew sneaking in at night, piercing the drums, and forcing us through lack of supplies, to put into Karachi at once and give them a chance to clear out of a ship where

the serang seemed distasteful to them. Something must have been wrong with that petrol store anyhow, to blow up as it did without a second of warning. If it was the crew, they paid dearly for their jerrymandering. Two of them were killed in the first blow-up and two more were badly hurt in the subsequent fire.

It is even possible (I am putting this supposition forward as an alternative), that the crew had meant to spill the petrol, burn the ship, and take to the small boats we carried (a gig amidships, and a long boat aft) and that we interrupted this scheme partly executed, when we came down on them in the early morning with the dhow.

You can see for yourself how impossible it would be for them to arrive in any port with that schooner and no owners. They would have handled the ship safely enough (for they are fearless sailors) even though the monsoon might still be expected to lash out again, sooner or later. I fancy they never expected to see us again, once outside the river, and the curious way they let us come up with them in the dhow, leads me to think they were probably all down below getting ready to scuttle the ship and take to the boats.

It would be a simple matter to set sail in the small boats for some native port up the Gulf of Cambay, land at night after sinking the boats, and so ashore, and no questions asked by a lot of interfering whites. That is the dread of their existence, the everlasting cross-examination of Westerners.

It is bad enough for clever Hindus, this strict accounting for the hazards of every turn and corner of life; the crew were simple sailors, honest in their way, but living in a state of bewilderment as partners in the incomprehensible activities of white men, that laid them open continually to unnecessary dangers.

If one of these wanton dangers cut off the white

men, the last thing the crew wanted was to be mixed up with a lot of police and law-courts about it. How could they know that no mischievous deeds of ours had started that riot? Much better close the whole matter quietly, and what could be quieter than the complete disconnection of the incomprehensible whites.

This is how matters stood with the crew, as far as Casmyth and I were concerned, and I had no intention of rating them for going off with our ship. But the *serang* was another matter. That had to be tackled, particularly as it looked as if my friend was in for a spell of sickness, and I should be the sole responsible person on the ship.

I was just making up my mind to go below and talk the matter out with Casmyth, and I was looking round before leaving the deck. Sure enough there was the gray bank coming up in the S.W. and already near the sun. I don't know how I could have failed to notice it so long.

I never got that talk with Casmyth, for by the time I had roused him, and we had got the topsails and jib in, double-reefed main and mizzin, battened everything down, and got the cutter swung in and the dingy stowed amidships, the breeze was a hatful, and it blew for two days and nights as steadily as a table punka.

The sea was never very bad at any time and that is why we made such a race of it. The crew knew as well as we did that the monsoon might breeze up into anything, that would take our sticks like matches, or poop us over the counter like a bath emptied on a thimble. They knew the danger, and yet there they were, like a lot of hangbacks! It was almost laughable to me, the way the old *serang* pushed them to the gear, pushed the ropes into their hands, and almost wept as he exhorted them to turn to with a will.

I think Casmyth and I snugged that ship down pretty

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nearly single-handed; either the exercise or the excitement roused my friend's spirits, for he threw off his sickness, took on a better color, and worked like a man inspired.

He went below as soon as everything was set, to plot our position on the chart and when he was through with that, we had a good square meal. One eye up the companionway, and one on your plate, and no time to talk. It was the first good food we had had for nearly two days; bully-beef, hard bread, tinned butter, Bath Olivers, cheese and whiskey, with half-ripe plantains as dessert. Casmyth ran up on deck once or twice during the meal, but he was soon satisfied the serang could hold the course he wanted, single-handed, unless there was a bad gust, and that we were ready for, at any moment. My friend went on deck to relieve the serang as soon as our meal was over; the youngest member of the crew was clearing away; he was very young and therefore rather less disaffected than the rest, and that is why he got the job of cook and scullery-maid.

I got out the log, and made some notes of recent events; this was my job as second in command. I still have that old log—it is before me as I write. The entry after the details of position, wind, weather, sky, sea, etc., runs like this: "Put to sea without mechanic for our auxiliary engine and no cabin hands. Captain Casmyth to perform engineer's duties in addition to his own, and Maung Lao the latter." Quite nautical, that entry. I put a curly-cue under the entry, regarding it with smiling satisfaction—I was proud of it—and then I looked up into the face of the steward, standing on the weather side of the cabin, regarding me with the profoundest dissatisfaction.

That is a strange look for a white man to see clearly on any sort of native's face, and it was immediately wiped out by the dropping of that curtain in his eyes,

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which shuts out all sincere communication between East and West. I could have shouted at the sight, it was so palpable,—the heart of the East laid bare! Then I had to clear out of the cabin at a call from Casmyth, and promptly shot back again with about a ton of water after me, as the first comber came over the weather quarter, and down the companion-way. What a flood was there!

From that moment till the end of the monsoon I never had one moment's real rest, nor did I feel any great sense of fatigue. Everything was forgotten in the glory of that four-hundred-mile dash across the Persian Gulf.

We sometimes took an hour below, lying in the sodden cabin in our wet clothes, resting perhaps, never really asleep, drugged with speed, walking or lying down or hauling on the sheets as the wind eased a little, in order to lie a point closer to our course, if possible.

We did not need a crew, we could have pulled the blocks off the spars just to show the joy we had in existence. The miserable crew tallied on behind us in a perfunctory manner (they are no good on a rope in any case, those laskars, except in dozens) and we roared songs into their sullen faces. We slapped their skinny backs and rolled down-hill with a pair in our arms as the old boaty laid down under a tearing gust,—and we didn't care if they had the hump of all the camels in the world!

That old Burman would cling with hands and feet to the wheel as we lay shouting and splashing in the scuppers and not an inch would he give till we struggled back to him and eased the great spokes down to get a bit off the wind. We never dreamt of shortening sail after we had set a storm-jib well in board, we would rather have seen them all split, or the masts

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go by the board, than haul off that S.W. drive. It's a wonder the masts didn't go; that ship was well found and a marvel on a beam wind. It's a greater wonder we didn't run something down at night, for usually the rain was too thick to see more than a few yards ahead. It was all risk from day to night and from night to day, and we gloried in it.

I ask no better end than sudden death by turning turtle in a breeze like that or swamping with a mighty following sea—both together for choice!

But all great and heroic periods of life drop back sooner or later to the level where our little souls are at home. We find that the prosaic business of ordinary living is our chief affair, and the pursuit of the elusive shekel is a deadly serious employment, but one never goes back to that employment with quite such low ambitions after a sail like that.

Toward the close of the third day we were gently let down from the headstrong heights of our rushing exaltation by the necessity of getting out more head sail, the wind was easing off and soon we could luff enough to shake out first a mizzen reef, then a main, and soon after, all the lot. We never got our topsails out again on that ship.

We saw the sun about tea-time and Casmyth got out his quadrant for a shot. When we had worked out our position, the astounding fact was revealed that we had clawed our way across the S.W. monsoon to within a hundred and fifty miles of the Arabian coast. I don't think such a feat has ever been done before in a ship of that size.

As a young man I spent all my spare time in yachts, and my business life in ships, on that coast, and I never heard of a similar feat being attempted or even thought of. Such employment engenders a greatness of spirit that made old England and America the bright eyes

of the world, before steam came in. Thank God, those brave days are coming again, but this time it is a re-incarnation of the spirit in air-men.

Soon we shall see a new heroic race of air-men whose daily work will force them into a death-grapple with the winds of heaven. Then will come into our midst once more that purging spirit of knightliness that reveals mankind next to the angels.

I was too elated at the thought of the good purpose we had wrested from the storm. We could make Jaskar now with a third of our petrol and leave plenty for easy going, back to Karachi. The wind was dropping quickly now and if we were to get the auxiliary under way before dark there was no time to be lost.

After a good square meal, Casmyth took three of the crew with him into the little engine-room abaft the companion-way, and I went down to the cabin to do some "literary" work in the log.

This is the entry I made, and it is the last—after the usual data about position, etc.—"Captain Casmyth took up his duties as mechanic as from to-day, Siang Mir is appointed second mechanic, and will be relieved from deck duty as necessary, but will draw no extra pay or allowances."

Casmyth said it was all wrong, like a lot of soldier's gabble; I suppose it was my previous experiences as adjutant of the Punjab Light Horse coming out. At one time in my life I was a very enthusiastic absorber of military manners and customs and there is no person so "pukka" as the enthusiastic amateur.

I had to light the lamp in the gimbals to finish my entry, for day slips into night very quickly there, and after my exhausting literary efforts I went up on deck to recover in the light evening breeze. The moon was just coming up, I remember; it was a lovely moon. Nearly all the clouds had disappeared and the clear-

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ness of the atmosphere after the storm seemed to make the moonglade a river of quicksilver.

I leaned over the taffrail. I remember thinking again of that look I had surprised the steward in, looking at the polished mirror of the moonlit sea, and a luxurious slackness seemed to creep all over my body, even my mind seemed relaxed—and then came that amazing vision and the explosion!

## CHAPTER IV

### BY OPEN BOAT TO ARABIA

When I landed on my feet after the explosion, Casmyth was shouting from the companion-way, "What on earth is that!" as he rushed up the steps two at a time, closely followed by the deck-hand, Siang Mir. We stared at each other for several seconds and then a red tongue of flame shot up from the middle hatch, followed by a great broad sheet of orange flame, topped by billows of greasy black smoke. The hatch was gone in the first explosion (I never saw it drop, if there was anything left to drop) and the mainsail was in flames in a moment, although it was well out board.

Casmyth took hold at once and shouted, "Call all hands aft, serang," and at the sound of the whistle they all appeared on the fo'c'sle head, but they would not pass that raging fire amidships. "I'll have to fetch them," he said, "keep her before the wind," then seized the slack of the mizzen sheet, tied another rope to it, and flung all but the parcelled end overboard on the weather side. Then he dashed off the little poop, into the waist and past that awful fire, passing the slack of the sheet outside the gear as he went.

He was only just in time, for the flames began to break through the shattered deck as he got to the fo'c'sle. He hauled in the rope he had dragged after him, until it was just clear of the water, and fastened it to the weather rail. He then forced one of the crew over the side, down the rope, and soon the kalashi had hauled himself along the ship to the poop. We dropped

him a line and hauled him up. The second one also came along all right, but the last two got badly scorched on the face as the flames began to stream over the bulwarks. Casmyth took the end of the rope, and jumped as far out as he could, and by swimming diagonally to our course, came off very lightly.

"Two gone up," said Casmyth, "not a hope for them in that inferno. Get the long-boat swung out," and he then ran down below into the cabin and started to throw things up the hatchway.

I posted a kalashi to catch them (it was as light as day, aft of the blaze), and another to pass them aft, and swung out the boat, with the help of the serang.

There was a big water-butt in the boat and I shook it to make sure it was full, looked at the bung, checked the masts, sails, oars, rudder, tiller, compass and lamps, and then joined Casmyth in the cabin. We worked like fiends in that awful heat, getting stores out, expecting the flames to burst through the bulkhead at any moment—explosions were frequent as the drums went off in the heat.

"Clothes, money, medicine," shouted Casmyth, "I'll bring the papers, a quadrant and chronometer."

Well, we tumbled everything into that boat double-quick, pushed off, and paddled about fifty yards to windward; the blazing ship was a sight, though the brilliant moonlight made it seem comparatively small from our boat.

The mainmast went overboard and plunged into the sea; we pulled away further, for fear it might shoot up near us, and stave us in. Then the mizzenmast went over, and the anchors dropped off the catheads as the flames crept forward and aft; the ship was broad-side on to the light evening breeze now and soon the flames were down to the water's edge, all round.

She burnt quite a long time at this stage, but eventu-

ally a swell heaved up high enough to pour inside, and down went the *Shah Jehan* in hissing clouds of steam!

The difference in the crew when we got into the boat was a wonder, and they got more cheerful at each explosion, and cheered when a blow-up made showers of sparks from the blazing wreck.

Casmyth and I were inexpressibly sad, as at the sight of a dear friend caught in an undeserved tragedy, but even our preoccupation did not prevent us noticing the merriment of the crew.

Casmyth turned on them savagely as they grinned and chattered at one big explosion, and shouted, "That's right, laugh, you devils, may you burn in hell like that ship." He never knew the reason for their merriment (nor did I exactly) and he was sick during their first sullen moods on the ship. I can pretty well guess the reason for that ghoulish shouting and pointing of our crew.

As I figure it out, they believed we had been up to something at Allahbunder, something careless white men can do and forget easily, but from which fearful Asiatic sailors would do well to keep clear. The ship was the connecting link between them and white boldness and lawlessness; what could be merrier than the dissolution of that link? Their troubles were now over!

I don't know whether such people get attached to ships and horses (and cars if you like); sometimes I think they do, and at other times I think they experience only a menial dutifulness in these matters. Occasionally I have extracted a lukewarm remark like, "*pukka ship*," or "*thik hai, Sahib*," from some serang, but never anything like the enthusiasm you can get from any Western sailor when discussing his craft.

Truly, I think their chief thought is that they are poor servants of a Western nautical deity that demands

as ceaseless and thankless attention and propitiation as the wind and waves by which it exists.

Be that as it may, they were as glad as Casmyth and I were sad to see our gallant ship go under that glittering night sea. We knew also that our troubles were only just beginning in that boat.

We had over a hundred miles to go to the nearest land, Ras Jebah or the Island of Masirah, and the only alternative was the chance of a pickup by the rare ships on the Aden-Karachi beat. The latter was scarcely worth troubling about for slimness. We had also to think of pirates on the Arabian coast. We had heard of such craft. They are peaceful country wallahs, with freights of dates, until a small defenceless craft comes along, one easily outnumbered or frightened, and then they are beastly pirates.

Really they were only cowardly sneak-thieves of coastal opportunity, but well worth avoiding in our case! You can imagine we did not relish the job of skirting that coast; the dangers of the open-boat voyage could be got over, but there was a chance of the monsoon breezing up again. That possibility haunted us like a nightmare. Provisions we had in plenty, and barring the possibility of swamping in the monsoon, rowing and sailing ought to get us to shelter before we had suffered excessively from exposure.

After the *Shah Jehan* went down, we had a council of ways and means. The last shot Casmyth had at the sun relieved us of any doubt about our position or our destination. We put down an average of two miles an hour for our passage to Ras Jebah, say two and a half days, allowing for leeway and contrary winds. Sounds like no great undertaking for six healthy men, but try it off the coast of Arabia in a temperature of 120° and with no proper sleep.

I came to know another side of Casmyth, and not

a pretty one. He drove those hands at the oars till they sobbed, their cracked lips drawn in a snarl, the breath whistling in their throats. He would not let me row. They said "Sahib, Sahib," in vain. I learnt afterwards he had been wrecked with a native crew before, and he was afraid of their reason giving way if they had time to think. They jump overboard, prompted by some mysterious impulse that we cannot fathom, and the sharks get them before you can pick them up.

He saved their lives and incidentally (quite sincerely incidentally, I must ask you to believe) he saved his own and mine. May I never see such slave-driving again!

Casmyth and I slept in turn (or pretended to), four hours on and off, and one kalashi rested at intervals of one hour; so each got one hour's rest in every four, and had to get his food and private affairs arranged in that time.

Casmyth, I know, now looked upon the crew as precious machinery, whereby we might with skilful handling save ourselves, and no sentiment in the matter could be considered. Without the machinery, we might not get to the shelter before the monsoon broke out again.

When my friend and I were on duty we watched the water and rations, and dealt each man his share as the time came round, all sharing alike. Casmyth and I ate and drank as each fourth man came off duty, keeping tally on the gunnel with a knife. At each hour each man had a mouthful of water, and so on again. The serang stood by to relieve any man who cracked up during the watches.

The course had to be kept by compass and the chronometer; we found we had no tables of logarithms, so it was not possible to check our course by the sextant.

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The wind was mostly contrary, blowing down the Gulf from the Arabian mainland.

The heat inflamed the corners of our mouths, noses, and eyes, and we were in constant dread of sunstroke from the reflection of the water striking on the back of our necks under our helmets.

I grew sore with sitting in the stern sheets in a constrained position. I begged Casmyth to let me row, but he refused abruptly. The matter nearly ended in a quarrel and at last I had to be content with the explanation that the serang was allotted the part of relief oar and my chief business was to do as I was told, that was to keep my half of the watch aft.

The unspoken dread of a last burst from the monsoon troubled my friend. No one can conceive the fury of such a burst if it is a bad one. A heavily-laden boat like ours might swamp in a few minutes with the rain alone, even before a sea got up. The burst we had on the schooner was a comparatively mild one, not enough to knock up a really big sea at any time, but who could tell what sort of burst was coming!

We were racing from this possibility; all this I learnt ashore afterwards, in safety. I think my friend was almost afraid to state the case completely to himself and therefore declined to enter into a discussion of it with me.

I took the first watch as we swung off on that long boat trip. Casmyth gave the course, looked at compass and chronometer and turned in—that is, he turned up his coat collar and slouched back in the stern sheets.

The first night was not unpleasant, though the moon-glade, being almost on a level with my eyes, became almost intolerable after a few hours. I was glad when my turn came to take a spell off. I do not believe Casmyth had been asleep, he merely sat straight up without a word when I touched his arm, then looked at the com-

pass and the sky to the S.W. where the first sign of trouble would appear.

The rations were arranged at our feet and we ate almost in silence. A softly spoken word or two, "fine night," "a little cold" and, "thanks," as I handed back a knife. Then I turned in, glad to get my eyes closed from the moon-glare on the water.

The regular movement of the boat made my head move backwards and forwards in gentle jerks, and despite our surroundings, I fell asleep. Casmyth said I had been snoring like a pig, and it was getting light when he shook me into wakefulness. I was sodden with moisture and the boat was dripping at every overhang. Such awakenings remain in the memory for life. Fear took hold of my throat like a spasm, fear gripped me to the bones, and I shivered like a man in the first cold fit of fever. I looked into the faces of our crew and saw their bloodshot eyes and stringy cheeks and it was then I made my second request to Casmyth for permission to row.

I thought his refusal brutal and silly; I was angry, and straightway forgot much of my fear but not my resentment. That resentment continued most of that day and it was not till the evening that I shook it off. We scarcely spoke a word to each other till the evening.

Soon after that I had my hands too full to think of it again. My friend developed a high fever and violent sickness ("strong belly-pains," as the serang said when he came aft to help me), he soon became light-headed and I knew that it was sunstroke. Probably his constant bending over the compass was the cause, the sun must have caught the nape of his neck. Also he was subject, predisposed to it as the doctors say, by just such another experience as this in the past.

There may have been some malaria too, for we were without mosquito curtains during our first spell in the

bungalow at Allahbunder. When I opened the medicine chest, I found most of the bottles were broken. Someone had probably dropped it, in the hurry to get away from the *Shah Jehan*. Luckily the quinine was all right, and so was the brandy, and I started with a cigarette paper full of the former. The serang and I rigged up a sail under the stern sheets and we laid my friend out under the thwarts. It was almost impossible to prevent his body becoming exposed if the men were to continue rowing, but it was all I could do.

Before he became delirious my friend had said, "Promise me one thing if I go out, you will keep the crew rowing, till you reach land; you must, man, don't you see you must!" His vehemence was like a madness, his grip on my shoulder like a vice. I promised, of course, at once; "Swear it," he almost shouted, and I gave him my oath. He seemed relieved, and more quietly went on to say that on no account must I interrupt the sequence of reliefs and, if possible, I must avoid employing the serang as oarsman.

You must remember he had been through this before, and knew all the dangers. Soon after he became quite delirious. The serang helped me to hold him down and to bathe him, wringing out the clothes in half sea-water, half fresh, all we dared use. Casmyth cursed me for a fool when I told him I had used some of our fresh water for bathing.

During his bad fits my friend would shout, "I'll brain the first man with the tiller who dares to stop rowing," or, "Hi, you, No. 2, you're not pulling, you're skrimshanking, you!"—but I will omit the rest. It was a terrible obsession, this fear of the crew stopping rowing. There was not a sign of it then, nor do I think they ever meant to if they could help it. At night Casmyth became worse, and even now I do not like to think of the awful battle I fought with him on that

desolate glittering sea. The serang took the tiller from me when I had to tend my friend—that man was a tower of strength—without him I could not have kept things running.

Toward morning of the second day Casmyth fell into a troubled doze, and in the dawn, woke up and asked for water in a weak but normal voice. In an hour or two he was able to sit up, and from that moment he took hold of his duties almost as if nothing had happened. He looked like death, and I believe he suffered a great deal of pain, but he controlled our boat till the end, and then he collapsed like a shut knife.

By this time our crew were beginning to waver occasionally under the awful strain. I shall not soon forget the tense hard look that crept into his face, watching with wolfish ferocity each man in turn, for signs of slackness. His orders became harsher at each relief, and toward the end he snapped and snarled like a mad dog. The crew pulled till their breath whistled in their throats, and a gray rim of dried spittle ringed their mouths; "Sahib, Sahib," they hoarsely whispered and "Row, or by God, I'll make you," was the only reply they got. *Tano! pucker! jeldi jao!*

Toward the close of the third night I think we were all a little mad, and I could neither eat nor sleep.

The tension was awful. At sunset some clouds were piling up on the horizon and it seemed as if we were still to be caught by the monsoon. The sun went down in a dirty and smoky streak of clouds; if those clouds became wispy at the edge we were done!

We shivered as the light suddenly diminished and then blackness seemed to rise out of the west. Was it the forerunner of the monsoon or only the swift Eastern night? We could not tell. We only knew that the boat must go on.

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A slight breeze stirred over the water, but we dared not stop the men to hoist mast and sail, they were rowing like automatons—without volition—the first stop would be the last.

Casmyth beat on the gunwale with his hand to try and keep a rhythm in the stroke; I said *Atcha, atcha, atcha*, at each beat of his palm, and snatches of the long-forgotten prayers of my childhood came into my head,

“—There is no health in us  
But Thou, oh Lord, have mercy upon us,  
Miserable offenders.”

and comfort I cannot describe came with those snatches of prayer.

“Let me row, for God’s sake,” I whispered to my friend. “No, no, I tell you, you may be wanted yet,” he said. “Hold on, hold up, and we may do it yet.”

Far on into the night, when sanity and security seemed to be sweet simple things of long long ago, I thought I saw a light on our starboard bow. It seemed too good to be true and I dare not speak of it till I was more certain; yes, there it winked again. “Look, look!” I whispered to Casmyth; “Yes, I know, I’ve seen it,” he replied, and then like a ghastly croak came the serang’s voice in the bows—“*Butti Hi! Sahib!*” (A light, Sir.)

The bow oar slumped down, and the serang pushed him aside and seized his oar. I sprang to stroke oar and double-banked him, on my knees, till the man fell forward with a sob and then I took his place and nearly pulled my heart out.

“We will do now,” said Casmyth, after an hour or so. “Easy all,” and looking over my shoulder, I could see several lights low down ahead. Our course had been altered to bring them head on. In another hour we were passing between the stone piers at the entrance to

a good harbor and I remember nothing more except a long strong drink. Casmyth collapsed, but he was up first, for all that. When I awoke in the warm morning I found he had tied us up stem and stern alongside the pier and poured brandy and water down our throats, and covered up crew and all with a sail. I must have had a strong dose of brandy, for sleep took me as if it had been a powerful drug. Casmyth also poured most of our fresh water on our heads, and then he went ashore to see if we were in a safe place.

He spent several hours of the night sitting on the pier above us and he says no one came near. He paid for his energetic skippering later in the day.

I am not going to give the name of that town now nor its exact locality, except that it was near Ras Jebah, almost at the westernmost point of the Gulf of Oman.

Our fear of making leeway had made us head up the Gulf some twenty miles more than was necessary; it was impossible to avoid doing so, as we had only dead reckoning by which to make our course.

The reason I do not give the name of our port is because we did a foolish thing by accident the third day we were there, we walked into a Mohammedan harem at a time when such an offence became a deadly crime, and had to take to our boat again to save our lives.

I will tell how this happened, in time and place. It was a thing that could happen to anyone and I cannot blame myself in any way, though I was our leader at the time.

After a little breakfast on the pier, it was still cool, and we decided to bathe in turns, each man to find his own bathing-spot, in a rocky part of the beach at the land end of the pier. We needed something to freshen us up, and shaving was out of the question because of the inflamed state of our faces.

That bath did us a lot of good; we smoked our pipes afterwards, and chatted with the crew and discussed the possibility of getting in touch with Viroschand, in the little town. The main question to decide was whether it was safe to leave the serang in charge of the boat while my friend and I went to examine the postal resources of the town, if any. Finally, it was decided to stick together till some samples of the townsfolk came down to the pier.

There were no ships at our end of the harbor and, at the town end, only a few country wallahs under the windows of the houses lining the back of the port.

We had not long to wait, and I shall not soon forget the mixed expressions on the faces of the crowd that collected and stared down at our boat. They were mostly negroes, speaking Arabic, and a few poor Arabs, sailors of sorts.

The negroes and the Arabs all wore dirty white cotton "jibbabs" or long shirts, and skull caps. My Arabic is limited but luckily Casmyth knew enough to explain our situation to them. We had to tell it over and over again and then they weren't satisfied; they thirsted for details of our voyage: the number of days and nights? had we been in the last burst of the monsoon? how did we find the town? and so forth.

Finally, when we thought that civility had received its due, we got tired of their questions and as they seemed friendly enough, we decided to risk leaving the boat in charge of the serang. We made for the town, followed by a few noisy negroes. The Arabs scarcely bothered us at all.

Well, the town was much like any other town on that coast, on both sides of the Gulf. White houses (streaked with fecal-brown window fringes) coming almost to the water's edge at the landward end of the harbor, and one or two narrow twisting streets leading

back into the town. Sand or dried mud everywhere, once you left the water-front which was roughly paved at the harbor's edge.

The houses were solid stone, I imagine, with plaster to keep out the monsoon. All glaring-white except for the bleached teak lattices in the windows and the heavy sun-warped doors. Each door led into a dark little courtyard, I discovered afterwards, but as far as we could see that morning, there was nothing but these doors and lattices along the street.

The street we had selected for exploration wound and twisted about till I lost all sense of direction and then we came to a kind of market, with a wooden roof over it—simply beams between the houses at the top story level, high or low, sloping according to the height of houses on either hand.

Here a large number of people were arranging dates and fruits and vegetables, etc. in front of the houses, on little benches and boxes. A few people, mostly negro women, were already beginning to barter for the goods exposed and they took little notice of us.

It is astonishing, now I come to look at it, how little comment we excited. "Allah! they have red faces," was all they seemed to say, as they gave us a casual glance and then went back to their marketing. This was exactly what we wished, but by no means what we had feared and expected. It gave us a chance to look around, and mark down the mayor or kaid's residence and also to see if there was a possibility of any postal arrangements existing in the place.

I need hardly say we found no such thing. If letters of any sort left that town they went by camel, and there was no sign of a telegraph post to be seen.

After wandering up and down for some time, we came to a big house with very few lattices and those high up near the cornice; it had enormous iron-bound

teak doors, and a flag hung over it. I knew this was the kaidi. It was still early morning, far too early to think of calling on ceremonious Arabs, but we found out all we wanted for the moment; remained the immediate problem of food and lodging, and that we solved by accosting a huge negro on our way back to the market-place. At first he did not seem very anxious to help, but eventually some silver thrust in his hand softened him and he not only agreed to provide us with food,—coffee, hot flat-cakes, mutton-stew and dates,—he became (after further bakshish) quite loquacious and told us all about the town, the people, the kaid, and in fact everything there was to know about the place.

There was another port, on the northern side of the town, which we had missed in the dark, and all the native shipping was there. The port was visited only by rare coastal steamers from Aden, Karachi, or the Gulf generally. Dates and ostrich feathers were the staple products of the place, but all the wealthy Arabs were engaged in some ramification of the pearl-fishing that is extensively carried on at the head of the Gulf.

Our host informed us that the best time to see the kaid was the early evening, and that he knew a man who knew an Arab, etc.—eventually leading to a payment for a definite engagement at the kaid's house at 5:30 that evening.

We learnt there was no steamer due to pass nearby for a week, that letters would have to go by camel to Maskat and thence across to Chabas or Jask by country boat, and so would we, unless we could arrange with a local ship to take us out to the Aden-Karachi trade route and flag a regular steamer on that route. We decided then and there to go to Maskat and leave our crew on "board wages" till we could get in touch by telegraph at Jask and arrange for a steamer to bring them to Karachi.

Casmyth was all for the Aden-Karachi boat, but I put my foot down and said he could do as he liked, but for my part, I had had enough of the sea for a bit, and I would go by camel in any case. He gave way when I reminded him of all we had gone through when he was sick on the second night after we left the *Shah Jehan*.

Our host agreed that the best thing was to arrange the camel trip with the kaid, and he told us to get a good Arab guard, no matter what it cost.

Of course we had to repeat the tale of our open-boat experience in detail, and that negro's face was a study when we told him we had rowed all the way from the *Shah Jehan* in nearly two days and three nights. "But how did you find this town?" he cried, and I am convinced he still thinks we were brought by a steamer, and dropped near the port.

Casmyth was drooping with fatigue by this time, and it was evident that he would collapse soon unless I could get him to rest and sleep. The amazing man was anxious to go back and arrange the quarters for the crew, but that I positively declined to permit. The negro had a little room upstairs, on the court side, and I thought he would be safe enough till I could get back from the harbor.

I helped him upstairs and saw him stretched out on a heap of rugs and cushions, and he was asleep before I could get out of the room.

I was not molested during my walk through the town, though I felt a good deal of curiosity was expressed behind my back; one gets such impressions from half-caught backward glances, and half-heard exclamations and arrested gestures.

When I reached the crew they were all in the boat, in the shade of an awning made of the mainsail; they seemed much recovered, but lay full-length under the

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thwarts, on their faces, with every sign of exhaustion exhibited in their attitudes. The serang climbed up onto the pier as I hailed him, and I bade him come with me to assist in the search for quarters for the crew.

It was evident we were not going to have any trouble with the townsfolk and I did not hesitate to leave the crew after the serang had pulled the boat out a few yards from the pier. He threw me a rope and I strained on it until the anchor rope was like a fiddle-string. The serang then jumped ashore and we threw the rope into the water. No one could get at the crew from land, and the crew were not likely to bother with ropes or oars, owing to the lacerated state of their hands.

We hunted high and low in the town but could find nothing but evil-smelling dirty go-downs, so I decided to try the negro host of the morning.

He was reluctant, thinking that I was overdoing it, I suppose, but a few silver rupees persuaded him, and he agreed to let the crew take up their quarters on the rickety balcony running round the little courtyard behind the house. Rather cramped quarters, but shady (the vines, running all along the roof, dropped strings of foliage almost to the ground), and shade is the greatest need in that climate.

My friend was still asleep when I crept into his room, and I decided to leave him and the crew alone for a few hours. I lay down near him and the serang slept outside on the balcony. I seemed hardly to have closed my eyes before the serang was knocking on the door. It was quite dark. I sprang up to find Casmyth already at the door, questioning the serang. He had not noticed me in the dark. Then we all went down to see the negro.

I was angry with the serang, who had been instructed to call me at four o'clock, but he, too, had sunk into a

profound slumber of fatigue and failed us. It was the first and last time he ever failed us.

Our explanations to the negro about oversleeping seemed very acceptable to him, he was wreathed in broad smiles (I have since discovered why). It was no use worrying, we had missed the kaid, and we would have to begin negotiations all over again tomorrow.

As a matter of fact, we never did see the kaid. I suppose that wily black scoundrel would eventually have done something in the matter, but he put us off for two days, and the third day saw us all back in our boat, far out to sea again.

There was always some excuse—the kaid was out or he was sick, or he was busy. We reached the limit of our patience on the third day, and we told him we would go to the kaid without his help, and also we would mention a few things about the negro when we got there. His face went a pale lavender color and I really believe he did make some effort to get us an interview that morning.

It may seem funny that we did not go straight to the kaid at first without the negro's help, but long residence in the East had taught us that a good report should always precede such a visit, bought by discreet presents to all the intermediaries that stand between a chief of any kind and casual visitors.

The whole Eastern system of administration is built up on this assumption. It can be done otherwise but I am not certain that any time is saved, and the cost, in the early stages of an interview, is (comparatively) very small; it is the chief himself who "soaks" you. Time, too, is only saved by Westerners and according to Eastern ideas, they should be willing to pay for a thing they value so highly and curiously.

Casmyth was quite recovered by this time, and we agreed to see such sights as the town afforded, and to

possess our souls in patience as best we could till the morrow.

After fixing up our crew and putting a killick on our boat in the harbor, which kept her some ten or twelve yards out, but left us a line on land by which we could haul her in, we went in search of food and objects of interest. Most of the shops were closed, but in the jewelers' quarter a few workmen were still hammering away at silver bracelets, etc. (mostly done cold, strange to say) on little anvils at their shanks on the bench where they squatted.

I asked permission to examine one of these bracelets but the man refused, not abruptly, but firmly enough. I insisted, and took it from the anvil. I soon dropped it, with burnt fingers; the constant hammering had made it far too hot to touch!

Such trivial incidents passed the time away till we thought it wise to return to our quarters with the negro.

Here had congregated all the ladies of the town, all vociferous, painted and scented like nothing on earth, and all flourishing the large testimonials of such commerce.

As in other forms of commerce, their testimonials were entirely unsolicited, so the ladies informed us. We scattered a few coins amongst them, and told the serang to drive them off. Our crew, of course, were hugely delighted with the whole incident.

We told the serang we should hold him responsible for our crew. Not one was to leave the house that night. I do not believe one did, either that night or at any other time we were in the town, which shows that he could hold such men, under normal conditions, and also shows that some abnormal circumstance had made the crew so undisciplined on the *Shah Jehan*.

It took a very grave matter, in their view, to bring out their resistance to a serang, however foreign. What

that matter was, I don't know even now, and can never know for a certainty. I can only guess. It may be that their original disaffection was due to some such ghostly visitation as I experienced, myself.

I shall have more to say of this later, it is sufficient to say now that this last theory occupied my thoughts as I lay down beside Casmyth in our little room. As for my friend, I do not think he ever gave a thought to the mental difficulties of the crew, and while he was at sea he didn't care much about psychic souls or souls at all, for that matter. You will remember his handling of the crew in the long-boat, nothing very psychic about that! I suppose he was like all captains of ships at sea, only at liberty to concern himself with practical matters, immediate actions and immediate results, the preventing or dealing with sudden emergencies. Ashore and at leisure he was another kind of man.

## CHAPTER V

### FLIGHT AFTER BREAKING INTO A HAREM

Long after our return to civilization we did discuss the behavior of our crew very carefully and Casmyth agreed that my last theory was quite possibly a solution of the whole mysterious affair.

A mystery it always was, and will remain, so I suppose, as far as I am concerned. A business man has little time to devote to such matters, however they may appeal to him. I frankly confess I have always been interested in that small part of psychical research which impinges on practical affairs. There is a point where such enquiries lead to nonsense, and the vamping up of accidental sequences and significances, but there is also a point where even the most practical matters may claim to have a certain aspect of mystery, a tiny facet only, if one is to remain practical, I admit.

After all, the basis and the ultimate significance of all human phenomena is mystery; whence and whither encloses even the most prosaic of mankind and all his actions, unknowable,—inexplicable,—entirely unreasonable as far as first causes and last results of them are concerned.

Explain birth and death, with some pulsing, vibrating mysterious thing called conscious life in between,—impossible! As obscure as the radiophone!

As an undergraduate, I was unspeakably shocked to find that Spencer had to assume the existence of a consciousness that could not be subjected to logical enquiry. I gave up philosophy then for good and came

to the conclusion that there is much in life one is not meant to understand or submit to logical enquiry. I have since been too deeply immersed in the problem of self-support to bother about such things, but one cannot do business in the East for long without being touched by a sense of only temporary "dis-insulation" from the mystery that encloses and penetrates all human phenomena.

Westerners are more perfectly insulated than Eastern peoples, a thicker coating of materialism is necessary, physically and spiritually, but the East teaches everyone that the vital spark that makes both East and West function at all inside their temporary insulation is only a part of the great mystery which begins and ends all things human.

As a practical business man, I never could see any great value in probing into such a matter, beyond the very limited connection that seems to exist between practical affairs and the mysterious direction they sometimes take without our volition, usually for our good in the end, and frequently merciful beyond our deserts.

When it comes to making a religion of it, I think such a thing is childish. Religion is chiefly a serious mental attitude in regard to one's duties, and a sacred source of help and inspiration that never fails when all material and profane aids have forsaken us in our utmost need.

As for the vehicle of the expression of such sacred things, I am indifferent as to whether it is in terms of Christ or Buddha, provided both are equally sincere and serious. The hairsplitting differences of sects in Christianity or Buddhism seem to me—nearly ignoble. An intolerant high-caste Church of England prelate and a Brahmin seem much alike, as far as their practical value in the world goes. One must be very fond of

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"It is not a question, in my mind, of their personal objection, it's the objection Viroschand has to our enterprise."

"What objection could Viroschand have?"

"He could have an objection to engaging in a vulgar exploitation of his own people."

"You mean our table waters were a fraud?"

"They were a fraud, as far as he was concerned, but not necessarily so to us."

"Hairsplitting! he could set the machinery in motion that sank his own ship?"

"He could, in my opinion."

"And sink us to boot! and the crew as well!"

"We did not sink, nor the crew, but the ship and cargo did. Mark that!"

"Viroschand is not so scrupulous in some of his other affairs, by all accounts."

"I have heard those accounts, and I don't know that they are entirely trustworthy."

"Well, you ought to know more about that than I; you are a business man, in the same line of business, too."

"I am, and personally I never yet found anything doubtful in his dealings, though I've heard all sorts of cackle behind his back; you know as well as I do the very real reputation he has for straight dealing."

"Well, then why did he come in, in the first place?"

"You forget the terrible stress of mind his own affairs must have put him under. He is a sportsman first and a merchant after and an introspective Indian after that. I think the whole three got jumbled up, under the stress of his affairs at the time."

"He certainly must have realized he looked like being in for an unholy smash."

"Well, would you get all your instincts to function logically under such conditions?" And yours are all in

a simple relationship to each other; remember that Viroschand is a Marwari, on top of all his other instincts."

"I don't know that I would, but Heaven forbid that I should carry such a lot of supercargoes in my barque of life."

"That's just it, and that's Viroschand down to the ground; he's all mussed up with Westernism, he can't get the good out of it we get and he can't get the good he ought out of his own Easternism. I tell you it's no wonder some of his affairs look funny on the outside, he's torn four ways at once and he does his damndest to go straight with that load. Poor old Viroschand!"

"Good old sportsman!"

How far we were then from appreciating Viroschand's real intentions in regard to us, this book will ultimately show; but the hard shell of our Western commercialism was first to be cracked before we could begin to understand our friend's attitude in regard to us.

We could have spent a year in that little port on the point of the Gulf, without tiring of its charms; we spent a whole day looking at the lattice-makers and wood-carvers and ivory-cutters alone, we did not even go into the parts of the town devoted to carpets, furniture and copper-work, brass-work, enamel-work, etc. Every craft had its little section, entirely composed of families or groups of families employed to the last man, woman and child in their own particular craft.

Each individual, according to his age, skill and experience, performed a particular task in the process of turning out some miracle of ingenuity when it was all assembled.

What a difference when compared with the idle caballing peoples of the other side of the Gulf! I suppose

it's the discipline engendered by the presence of the Arabs. They all seemed too merrily occupied with their work to bother about us. We should not have done much in the table-water trade there!

At the end of the ivory-cutters' section of the town we came across the old wall of the city. We had never noticed it before; there was a broad wall enclosing the whole place, with a land gate and two water gates at the seaside. The port we first entered was the principal water gate and the houses on the quay side were built against the old sea-wall, perhaps forming part, and certainly masking it. I suppose the houses had been added in the late peaceful times of British control of the Gulf. Anyway, it was evident that at one time the whole town was a fortified city and nothing of any importance was outside the walls.

We had not time that afternoon to explore the walls, but we promised ourselves a pleasant task the next day.

We had to dash back to our negro host to ask about our interview with the kaid. His replies were an irritating string of evasions, as I have already indicated, and it was then we let the negro understand our minds about his shuffling. He kept us waiting fully an hour and a half with rumors of the return of his messengers, till at last his excuses and our tempers became so thin that we could no longer contain ourselves. We parted from the old black scoundrel with a clear understanding that tomorrow he get us an interview or take the consequences; we were very angry and I daresay rather violent; at any rate the negro thought the time had come to end his farming of us and he paddled off up the street in the direction of the kaidi and we saw him no more that night. His wife served up the usual sheep's head with rice and coffee and dates and as we

wanted to prepare a letter for Viroschand to go by camel-rider to Maskat, we took a lamp upstairs and settled down to it.

Casmyth had been worrying all day about that letter, but I put it to him that we should be unwise to trust a letter by small coast-craft and still more unwise to send it by camel, unless it was sent with the "dhobi mark" of the kaid on it. This we had expected to get in the evening, and it seemed pointless to write till then, I thought.

Our disappointment of the evening made the writing of that letter imperative, under any conditions. We described our unhappy adventures in Allahbunder, our race up the Gulf, and the fire and our present state, and asked him to send more "dope" for making table waters and bottling-plant, etc., to Karachi, also credentials to enable us to get another ship. There was also a statement of accounts to date and finally, we drafted a code-cable giving a précis of our affairs, to prepare him for the news in detail, ending, "letter follows."

Neither letter nor cable were ever despatched, simply because of our sudden departure from the place. I have both letter and cable before me as I write, sea-stained and faded; those and the log of the *Shah Jehan* were all we saved at the last.

Although tired enough to long for bed, we called the serang and questioned him about the crew and then took a turn in the bright moonlit street. A deep stillness pervaded the whole town, our feet made no noise in the sand. Pale blue moonlit walls everywhere and blue-black shadows (Payne's gray, Casmyth called them) at every opening and deep under the eaves. No lights anywhere, no sound except a far-off soft rustle of the sea at long intervals. A few camels, with riders muffled to the eyes, were on us and going past before we noticed

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them, so softly they moved. We walked to the port, looked at our boat, loitered a little while on the quay and turned back.

As we neared our lodging I was surprised to see several muffled figures, obviously Arabs and obviously armed, by their silhouette, leaving the doorway of our house. It seemed ridiculous to cry out in that stillness, and they had disappeared in the twistings of the street before we got to our door.

Casmyth looked up the street and then at me, and finally we shrugged our shoulders and knocked softly on the panels.

The negro opened the door, sleepy or affecting to be so, and we questioned him sharply about the Arabs. He knew nothing, of course, and we went to our room forthwith. But we spoke to the serang and ordered him to set a watch the whole night, four hours on and four hours off, and to call us quietly as each watch was changed. We did not think it worth while to watch ourselves; we might easily have mistaken a chance stop in the doorway by the Arabs for something it was never meant to be.

I believe now that the negro not only went to the kaid but told a lot of lies about us when he got there. The way the hue and cry started after us the next day, when we were running for our boat, was altogether too spontaneous, in a peaceful town of craftsmen and shopkeepers.

I know we committed an unforgivable crime in breaking into the harem, but even that could not account for the swift and organized retribution that befell us.

Nothing happened during the night, the serang reported all well and once I went out and once Casmyth went out mid-watch, to find the kalashi on guard and fully awake, and, I suspect, the serang too, although he

was lying down wrapped up in an old spare sail from the boat.

In the morning at breakfast, the negro told us he had definitely arranged an interview for us with the kaid at 7:30 p. m. This did not square with his previous statements about the best time to see the kaid and we cross-questioned him pretty closely.

However, we decided to try once more. There was little to do but explore till evening. Before we set out we had a long talk with the negro about the shipping of the port generally and the Aden-Karachi steamers in particular. Such conversations whiled the time away as we smoked our after-breakfast pipes in the shade of the courtyard, and the negro seemed to know what he was talking about. There was more than a hint of ingratiating readiness to volunteer any information he could.

The morning we passed at the boat, just to keep the crew employed for a time (they had been idle long enough), scrubbing out, coiling ropes, rolling sails, filling water-breakers, going over the articles in the lockers, compass, and heavy stores still in the boat, like bully-beef and biscuit, etc., and finally we ordered one of the crew to stay by the boat with the serang, and the rest to accompany us during the day.

After lunch, which was chiefly cold stew and coffee, we decided to take our half of the crew for a smart walk and explore the ancient walls of the town. We struck the wall at the end of the street in the ivory-carvers' section and climbed up one of the numerous staircases ascending parallel with the inside face of the wall and found a well-paved path on the top, just behind a thick breastwork.

I should think we walked along that wall for two or three miles, stopping at intervals to examine a piece of carving let into the breastwork, or for Casmyth to

make a sketch of the town or the country outside the walls. The country was naked desert with a hint of trees at intervals, in patches—dots for tamarisks or fuzzy-topped strokes for palms.

We kept in the shade of the breastwork as much as we could, for the heat was intense. The breast-wall (misnomer, but I know no other that describes the purpose of the wall so well) was about seven feet high and had almost continuous steps (like the fire-step of trenches) leading up to it from the flagged path, the top step raising one eye-level with the battlements.

We came to the landward gate, a great stone tower, thirty feet deep, inside to outside, with the great wooden doors still hung on huge wrought-iron pinions, the doors thickly studded with curiously wrought nails. The great doors were open that afternoon and no one seemed to be in charge. I do not know if the doors were closed at night. I strongly incline to that belief, for the pinions were covered with fresh-looking black iron grindings mixed with grease. We went down and up the staircases flanking the great doors and so round the town.

I suppose it must have been about six o'clock when we came to the gap in the wall. It was about ten feet across and was too steep on our side to climb down, though the far side seemed quite feasible. The houses at no part of the town came near the wall; they were set back about a hundred yards, and each house had very high fence walls, quite unscalable, running back to the city wall, enclosing its compound or back-yard. Trees frequently grew in these yards near the wall and it was such a tree near the gap that tempted us to swing by the branches to the trunk, and so down to the ground; and thence to the far side of the gap that blocked our progress. I went first and landed on the ground quite safely and then Casmyth came, slipped his grip among

the leaves and hurtled through the branches to the ground. He was badly bruised and one leg was horribly scraped and the ankle either dislocated or so badly twisted that he could not walk.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! In a Mohammedan sacred back-yard in broad daylight, in a strange town! We couldn't get Casmyth up the gap in the wall and we couldn't get to the staircases because of the numerous lateral fences. We stared at each other in consternation; the crew looking down on us, awaiting orders. There was nothing else to do but to order them down and get them to carry Casmyth to the house. A funk-ing job under any circumstances, alone, but with a bunch of sailors, excessively dangerous. We got the crew down safely and Casmyth decided to wait and see if his ankle would improve with a little rest.

We went into the shade of an embrasure at the base of the wall, well out of sight, and in half an hour Casmyth said the pain in his leg was much less. We found a stake, heavy but sizeable, near the tree, and hobbling with that, and his hand on the shoulder of one of the crew, we set our faces toward the house.

It was a bare dusty open space we had to cross, and had at one time been a formal garden, judging by certain rectangular markings on the ground like the traces of plot borders or dwarf walls. Facing us directly was a low line of outhouses running three sides of a courtyard and the ruins of a fourth we passed through to the usual court adjacent to the house.

The outhouses were empty, doors ajar or missing, no dogs or horses, and we had hopes that the house itself was empty.

Well, at last we got to the house and found there were three high doors set deeply in the wall; all were closed, all windows shuttered, no sign of life anywhere. Which door to tackle—all alike—try the first

with a gentle knock—no result—another—same result—hooray, house empty—try to force the door, locked firmly.

Nothing now but to try the other door. I lifted the latch and walked straight into the most intimate incidents of a Mohammedan harem! There was a squealing, like rabbits under a ferret, with a swishing, scurrying, like hens before a terrier, and the women snatched up garments and shawls and scuttled into the recesses of the house. One man was there and he came straight at us with hideously distorted face and foaming mouth; he did not make a sound then nor till some time later. He was a middle-aged man of powerful build. I meant to catch him by the throat and choke him, but Casmyth struck him down with his stake over my shoulder, and gasped out, "Through the house! through the house!" and dragging one man with him, we dashed through that room into another, similar, then through some curtains into the inner court, with a marble tank in the middle, and across this through two more dark rooms, the last with barred windows on the street,—no good,—back again to the inner court, a dark passage to the right with a gleam of light at the end,—screams all over the house now, racing down the passages as men appeared in the tank court,—God Almighty! the door was not locked into the street, and bearing Casmyth along like a bundle, we rushed through it.

I do not remember seeing anyone or anything distinctly, once we started running down that street; one glance back showed the men pouring out of the doorway, with swords and guns.

They began to fire as we turned the first corner, and I should have run straight down that street till I was shot, I suppose, but as we turned a corner, Casmyth whipped me up an alley and through a door that stood ajar some twenty feet up the alley,—the crew after

us. We closed the door and heard the infuriated men rush past down the street. Now up this alley to see where we are, if possible, from the house-top at the end.

A wooden stair led up to a balcony and thence we were a few seconds climbing to the flat roof. Away over to the left was the harbor, we could just see the ends of the piers beyond the houses. Over this roof and on to the next with a jump and a scramble, dragging my friend across somehow; two more flat roofs close together and then a wide gap; down another staircase into a yard, screams from a woman with a baby, both disappearing as we tore for the gateway at the end of the yard.

The shouting was getting louder in volume every second now; the whole town would soon be buzzing like a hornets' nest. We dare not stop to think what the end of the yard might produce.

A man ran out with a knife at the gateway, I bundled him over with a low rugby tackle, and his head cracked on the paving of the yard; I flung him into a doorway and rushed after my friend, who was peering round the gateway and urging us back with his stick. All together we rushed back up the yard as Casmyth said, "Try the roof again, and then right, to the city wall, the kaid's house is just down the street, and they are pouring out with guns and spears."

We had not a moment to lose; that yard was a death-trap; the woman with the baby might start screaming again at any moment, not to mention my rugby victim. The noise of our pursuers was louder than ever now and more vehement, guns were going off all the time and every moment we expected to see the yard fill with a blood-hunting mob, maddened by that most awful and fascinating of human desires, to kill man. Whoever has hunted man will never again lust after beasts to hunt!

The only thing in our favor was the fading light; if we could only hold the mob off till dark, we might make the city wall, drop over and creep along to the beach before moonrise and gain our boat. Once on the roof, some distance away from the yard, we held a council of war. To plan (that was it, we must plan)—any plan, keep cool, think, weigh up the possible actions of the crowd (thank God, we were dealing with a mob, they would act at first instinctively, as a compact mass, we knew) we must do these things—we panted in each others' faces.

Casmyth took hold as usual. He said, "We must make a litter for me to ride in, and the crew must carry me in turns, or I shall spoil all; let us set about this and we will think better with our hands employed."

A couple of poles from an awning and a rug found on the roof gave us our material for the litter, and Casmyth knelt by my side, whispering quickly, "Our chance depends on keeping the mob together, if once they think we have slipped out of their clutches, they may scatter and then someone is sure to think of our boat,—you see that?—Well,—we must split into two parties, one with you, to go straight at the mob, and one with me, to go as slowly as we dare to the city wall and wait for the other party to double back to us at a fixed meeting-point. Then we must break for the boat."

"What is to be our fixed point?" I said.

"No point will be safer or more easily found by us all than the break in the wall near the harem."

"You're mad," I said.

"No, I'm right, they will never credit our boldness in laying such a course, and besides, you must try to lead them in the opposite direction when you show up."

"But that break is miles from the harbor, we had

been walking on the wall several hours when we came to it."

"That's just it, we must have nearly completed the circuit of the town; now do as I say, get off with your men; this litter will do now, and—here—put my coat and topee on one of your fellows; that will make the mob think I am with you."

"You will kill us all."

"I'll save you all if you will only obey me." Anger was getting hold of my friend, at my resistance, and I remembered that wolfish ferocity of the days in the boat. More words were useless between us and I thought us already dead men. I believed he was near to violence, and reluctantly I ordered the men to follow me, saying nothing to them of my intended movements.

Twilight stars were coming out and I marked the direction of the gap and set off. It was not difficult to find the mob—over a few roofs, down a dark court full of dung and animal litter, creeping down a narrow twisting street and we were up with the noise of the firing and shouting. The general noise was beginning to settle down into an appreciable measured beat and drums were beginning to sound—all well—I dreaded a cessation of the noise, which would mean splitting and scattering.

If only we had some guns now we could get and hold the attention of the mob! We must do it, somehow, so I put my men near a ladder leading up to a roof, just behind a gateway, and told them to wait for me. I crept near the mob and hid in the shadow of a door; the leaders were trying to hold their mob in council; I must stop that. A man nearly fell on top of me as he opened the door I was hiding behind (he had gone back for a gun,—a long rifle dropped from his hands). I was on him in a second, pushing my

knee on his throat and stuffing his cotton jibbah into his mouth. He was soon still. I tied him up with my belt and fastened his wrists behind his back with my key-chain, windlassing it tight with the marline-spike of my sea-knife.

I reefed up the waist of my shorts to a side button, collected the gun, powder flask and caps and crept back to my men. They were shivering with fright. I beat them up the ladder onto the roof and deliberately fired a shot into the mob at the first lull in their shouting.

Great work! they spun round like teetotums and gaped in my direction,—time to load. I dragged the kalashi wearing Casmyth's helmet near to me, so that he would show up in the flash, and fired again.

I shouted defiance and tried to make the crew shout, but they would only feebly move their arms, and then off we dashed, over the roofs, in the opposite direction of the gap in the city wall; firing as quickly as I could load, slowing up when we neared a street. No one came up from the houses we crossed except some women who disappeared screaming. Soon the foremost of the mob appeared on the roof we had left behind. If only we could keep them moving for ten minutes more, we might drop into an alley and break back. There seemed a tendency for the mob to enclose us with flankers, and it would be dangerous to continue in our present line (that is, as far as I could judge things in the gathering darkness), and I decided on a ruthless expedient, if I could stiffen the crew enough to help me do it.

I would send them in one direction to our front right flank and I would go left and fire a house. I quickly explained my intention to the men and told them to wait ten minutes for me and then to break back for the gap in the city wall. I marked the spot for the crew to go on to the right, and then jumped

walls and stumbled onward across roofs for five minutes on our left. I had plenty of matches and soon had a blaze started; the mob coming rapidly in our rear, howled at the sight and I saw all press together to make for the fire. My chance!—I went back to my crew and we jumped and scrambled madly over the flat roofs for some twenty minutes. Then a rest for breath and some reconnoitring.

It was nearly dark now, and the blaze from the fire was still going strong. We found a feasible balcony and slipped down posts and creepers to the ground. A camel-smelling alley led to a narrow street that bore in the general direction of the gap in the town wall. I hustled my men along and boldly took to the street; no signs of the mob except shouting getting faint.

It was all chance now. That narrow side-street led to a main one, and we ran along it till we found another side-street pointing in the right direction, and if the stars had not been clear between the houses, I do not think we should ever have found that gap. We did though, after breaking into an empty house and once into a back-yard, when we caught sight of the town wall, like a black barrier stretching right and left.

We had the luck to find a stairway up the wall in the yard of that empty house and we were soon with Casmyth at the gap. I panted out our exploits briefly and he said, "Splendid! I knew when I saw it, that fire had saved us. Look it's getting brighter in that direction every minute."

He had spent the time in getting several rafters from the ruined outhouses I have already mentioned; to make two poles long enough, he had spliced and tied them, placing them between the bottom of the gap and the ground on the outside of the wall. They would

probably break at the first attempt, but we would have to go down, one at a time, and splice after each man.

We commenced our descent at once. Casmyth went first, so that he could splice on the ground. He broke no poles. The crew, all light men, then got down before the first break. Then I went down, and the splices of both poles broke and let me down with a rush into the arms of all at the bottom. No harm done. Casmyth's litter or bier had been slid down first, so he got in and we set off in the shadow of the great wall. What lay in front of us we were too worn out with violence and exhaustion to think about. We only knew that the beach must be somewhere ahead and beyond that we did not care to think. Our luck had been amazing so far, skill had done something in the past emergencies too, but we were empty of skill now. Our throats were dry and we spoke in choking whispers, dribbling phlegm onto our shirt fronts, when it did not go well clear of our swollen lips when we spat. Our bruised bodies began to hurt us abominably, we were all in rags and smeared from head to foot with dirt and filth. Our spirits loathed our situation as deeply as one loathes dirty clothes; could two sober sensible men ever regret such folly enough till the end of their days? We had been trapped (accidentally, it is true) by an affair only fit for drink-mad common sailors. Ugh! loathsome evil pitfall!—how we longed to be away from that town by any means!

These were my thoughts as the sense of escape from immediate danger was extinguished by the loneliness closing upon us and the chill of the Arabian night attacked our bleeding and battered bodies.

We spoke no words as we stumbled along, softly cursing stumbles over stones fallen from the ramparts of the wall. Casmyth groaned a little from time to

time, but I do not think it was due to his bodily pains, it was his spirit in like case to my own.

We changed the men under the litter poles and silently plodded on. Would that beach never be reached? The noise behind the wall was very faint and intermittent, only perceptible when we were making detours around obstacles at the base of the wall, fallen heaps of stones, outcrops of rocks at the base, clumps of bushes—such things.

I do not know how long we followed the wall, I never looked at my wrist-watch till the beach was reached at last. It seemed a long time. It was nearly eleven when we first heard the soft low rush of the sea on the beach, and turning a bulge in the great wall, beheld the sea.

Our spirits rose—perhaps we should reach the boat, after all! We pushed on more quickly now, the moonlight was increasing. It was worth hurrying to get there before the moon got well up—much better chances of evading observation.

We knew we should not have to pass the fishermen's gate and harbor, that was on the far side of the town from us. We were rapidly approaching the sea now, hunting shadow as well as we could, and at last we saw the pier-head above the rocks piled up along the beach.

When we reached these rocks and lay in their shadows, we talked over the best way of approaching the boat.

Casmyth was for a land approach, one by one hunting shadow till we got to the pier and then worming along till we got in speaking distance of the boat, the first man to drop quietly into the water, swim out to the boat and warn the serang, no one on any account to hail. The boat was to be brought close to the pier, in the shadow of it, if feasible, the first man then to

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come back and warn the rest to approach singly on their bellies across the pier. A plan full of hazards at every part. I vetoed it.

I was for swimming round the pier and bringing the boat out of the harbor and opposite our rocky hiding-place.

"Sharks," said Casmyth.

"All risk," said I, "sharks no more than other kinds."

"All right," said he, "who's to go?"

I immediately started to strip and forthwith crept over the rocks, stark naked. A sudden cold wind cut me to the marrow, and my hands and knees were cruelly hurt on the bruises already there. The sea seemed deliciously warm as I crept into it and I slipped over on my back, "paddling" with my hands at my hips till I had cleared all rocks and then I struck out swiftly for the pier about two hundred yards away. I could see no one on the pier, but my angle of vision was not to be trusted, as there might well be people lying down in the middle, or watching our boat on the far side, so I kept well out from the pier till I could round it and get a view of the inside of the harbor.

The moon was clear of the town now and I soon looked right up the harbor. Our boat was gone!

I suddenly felt too beaten and tired to swim, a shark then could have got me, without a motion from me to evade him.

How could I go back with such news?

Well, I was there and I would see the harbor properly. The boat might be behind some projection of the pier. I would make sure, though I could not remember any such projections. I swam slowly in the middle of the harbor; there was no one on the pier, the noise in the town had died down now completely, though the light from the fire was still to be seen

reflected in the sky, like an aurora. I judged the whole town was now fighting the fire. I never found out nor thought more of it, for as I swam in close to the pier my heart jumped into my mouth as a voice in the deepest part of the shadow softly said, "Sahib, Sahib!" It was our serang, up to his neck in the water and supporting himself at the base of the pier by the weeds. I must have sunk at the ghastly improbable sound seemingly coming from no human body.

The serang says I disappeared and he struck out toward me, clutching my hair as I came up near the surface; I would come up quickly in that fainting condition, with all the breath still in my lungs. The serang dragged me to the seaweed and held me up till I recovered a little.

"Where is the boat?" I said.

"In the fishermen's port," he replied.

It seems he had heard the shouting and firing, and prompted by our Allahbunder experiences, had taken on himself the risk of amending our orders to stay in the harbor at anchor till we returned. As soon as it was dark he had pulled quietly out of the harbor to the fishermen's port and hidden our boat between two dhows near the mouth. He had then swum back to the pier opposite our anchorage, to wait for us.

He must have been in the water something like three hours. Give me a Burman for pluck! He was chattering and sick with cold, and still cheerful. His fat helped him to endure, I suppose. Burmans are all plump, you know. He said afterwards he had just made up his mind to go back to the boat when he saw me swimming in the harbor.

Now, what was the best thing to do? Something swiftly, for Casmyth would be getting anxious. I at last decided to keep away from the boat (my white face and body would be a clear mark in the moon-

light—not so the serang) and swim back to Casmyth, the serang to bring the boat round to us. I described our hiding-place and with final instructions to the serang about muffling oars, hunting shadow, and above all, silence, I left him and swam back to our party.

I had difficulty in finding them, Casmyth says he hissed continually from the moment I left the water near the rocks, and at last threw a stone in my direction. That startled me and if I had not seen the top of his white topee in the moonlight I think I should have taken to the water again, fearing some native fisherman, for I thought it might be one (they habitually fish along the beach in the moonlight with round flinging nets).

I gave my friend the news of the boat and got dressed, Casmyth rubbing me all over with his coat and rolling me up in the rug of his litter afterwards. I was chilled to the bone, and my bruises and cuts smarted from the effects of the sea-water.

We waited for nearly half an hour for the boat. It came at a slow speed, naturally, and a lot of shouting with it from the direction of the fishermen's port. "Hell!" said Casmyth, "we've bungled it, after all. We had better start to swim out," and we forthwith plunged over the rocks and into the water. We reached the boat, tumbled in and took to the oars and pulled to sea just as the first native boat got clear of the port.

## CHAPTER VI

### A DARK SHIP AND A LADY'S VOICE

"*Pukkerro! Tano!*" ("Lay into it, my hearties") said Casmyth, "we will soon leave that lot behind," and he was right.

The native boat was clumsy in build and method of propulsion and we were out of sight of them in an hour. It seems that some fishermen had returned from the town to their boats as our serang was slipping out of their port; they had spotted him and started to shout, on sight.

What a lucky escape for us all! And yet, why lucky? Our destiny was to be caught in far worse nets of hazard later on.

Still paddling strongly, we broke open a box of biscuits and opened beef tins and we all had a short drink, Casmyth saying we must ration water at once, and therefore no more than one tot of brandy from the medicine chest. It would only make us more thirsty.

I don't think we could have eaten till we had that drink, we were so parched with excitement and fatigue.

I took my wrist-watch off and gave it to the serang, and promised him a gold chain if ever we got to Calcutta again. He got the watch, but I didn't get him a chain, alas!

Casmyth grudgingly got out some grunts about "lucky work" and "damned risky business." I rated him (razzed him is better and nearer my meaning) about his churlishness and I'm hanged if the fellow didn't flash into one of his sudden Irish tempers and abuse

both me and the serang for taking the disobedience to his orders too lightly. Heaven preserve me from all Irishmen and sailors, especially captains; they are as complicated and difficult to fathom as Viroschand himself, and possess none of his gentleness of manner or generosity of spirit.

There are lots of things I would like to say here about the contrast between my friend and Viroschand, but I dare not digress if I am to keep this narrative readable and in reasonable sequence. I have transgressed too much already in that way, I know, but it was done in order to show Viroschand in clear lights from numerous standpoints, to unfold his complicated character gradually, in the way I learnt to appreciate it. All these lights were soon to be extinguished in a blaze of illumination round him that made all our previous glimpses of him like little pin-pricks in a dark screen enclosing a nobly flashing light, but that belongs to the end of this narrative. Incidentally, I shall have to expose my own mean, flickering, Westernism in contrast, but that also comes later.

Our situation in the boat was serious. We had no sextant nor accurate compass, our stores were very limited and our clothing—what we stood in. The bulk of our gear, except the sails, was ashore and we could not go back for it.

Two courses lay open to us, to row up the Gulf to Maskat, about a hundred miles, or to strike out into the Gulf (we could probably do most of this, sailing) in the hope of getting an Aden-Karachi steamer, about the same distance. We had learnt from our late host, the negro, that there was a steamer passing in about three days; that was certain, for we had checked it by some sailing-lists Casmyth had found in his papers on the night we wrote our report to Viroschand.

To go south to Masirah was out of the question; it

was too near the scene of that violated harem, and the fire I had started capped the sum of our iniquity.

We were very doubtful about going to Maskat, for news of us would travel much more quickly by land than we could travel by sea. A report of us might very well precede and we should be sailing into a trap ready and waiting for us.

On the other hand, we had no definite means of tapping the Aden-Karachi line. We might easily miss it by twenty miles, especially with a good bowling breeze and little smoke coming from the ship's funnels. There was always a chance of tramps on the same line or near it, but that was a chance too remote to reckon on.

After debating the matter up and down, we decided on a compromise, embracing half the possibilities of both ideas, that is, to sail out and up the Gulf, hoping to strike the Aden steamer (which we preferred) and if we missed it, put in near Maskat, at some place conveniently above or below, scout about for information and renew stores and water by such means as seemed wisest when we got there; thence on to Chabas across the Gulf, where we would be safe at last.

Our compromise was forced on us chiefly by our reluctance to subject our crew to another hard bout of rowing. Their reserve of stamina is not like ours; it is limited. They take a long time to recover from heavy strains and they might very well crack up under another gruelling. Sailing, then, was the solution of our problem, N. and W. across the breezes that blow down the Gulf as soon as the monsoon stops. Accordingly we hoisted sail forthwith and started to keep a very careful record of our progress, by dead reckoning.

The evening breeze was quite fresh that night, and the last of the moonlight not too strong to be a source of discomfort. We were cold in our wet clothes but otherwise not suffering to any extent. We bathed our

cuts and anointed ourselves with vaseline and bandaged the worst with strips of puggaree from our topees (a puggaree, as you know, is many yards of fine muslin); it was the only clean stuff we had, as the rolled bandages in the medicine chest were all spoiled by the breakage I have mentioned.

Well, we lay along to windward, getting colder as the night advanced; the crew had dried in their clothes with that burst of rowing from the beach and were perfectly contented, even quietly merry as they lay under the forward thwarts, licking their scratches. The serang had the tiller.

At last I could stand the cold no longer, and turned on Casmyth and said, "I am going to take an oar and get some warmth into my body."

"Sure," said he, "and I'll join you."

"Join me, then why in heaven's name didn't you let me row on our last trip?"

"That's another matter altogether; we had the monsoon to think of, discipline was the only thing that could have saved us if it overtook us. I had to keep you as reserve, after-guard, and the crew employed, as I explained to you."

"You're a whale on discipline."

"I suppose I am; I got enough in my young days in the *Worcester* to stiffen me for the rest of life."

It was not very effective rowing, but it helped our circulation to keep moving, and moreover it helped us to creep up to windward a little—more north, that is, and up the Gulf.

After a spell of rowing I said to my friend: "I suppose it was discipline that made you keep one man in the boat in the harbor all the time."

"Partly," he replied, "but it was more my fear of thieves breaking open the lockers, and also because I like to keep a line of retreat in good order."

"That's soldiering."

"Maybe. I learnt it trading on the west coast of Africa. Our greatest dread in advancing into unknown country there was always the fear of a closed retreat. The advance was nothing, that fear of a closed retreat haunted us at every step forward. Often, too, we had to fall back through lack of provisions alone, and where should we have been without an effective base—that reminds me we have only eight days' food and water, with the strictest rationing. That means three days out to the Aden-Karachi line, one day to wait, and four days beating up to Maskat."

As it turned out, we were only two more days in the boat.

The night passed pleasantly enough, once our clothes began to dry upon us, and soon we were warm enough to sleep when not on watch. The man who steered had the privilege of wrapping himself in the spare foresail. Near dawn the breeze faded out and we roused all hands for a spell of rowing, knowing it would be only a short time before the morning breeze got up. Also it prevented the crew getting "doldrums." At that hour things always look their worst and we only needed to carry them and ourselves over till the cheerful light of day came. With the dawn came a good breeze down the Gulf and we hoisted sail again and set off merrily on our course.

So passed two days and two nights, watching, rowing, sleeping, and occasionally bathing in the bows, in a looped-up sail.

No pursuit ever got in sight of us. The breeze was too light for dhows. On the first morning we thought we saw lateen sails behind us, but they were so far behind as to cause us no anxiety, and they might very well have been coasting boats, to or from Masirah. Subsequently we saw occasional Gulf-country wallahs (big,

heavy, high-sterned boats with raking lateen sails), but we could keep far to windward of them, especially with the help of a little rowing. The heat during the day was terrific, but we could keep under a wetted sail most of the time and did not suffer nearly so much as on our last open-boat experience.

On the evening of the third night, soon after sundown, Casmyth said he thought he had seen a wisp of smoke over to the nor'west, but it was so slight that we did not like to discuss it much till we were more sure, and besides, it might have been only a wisp of cloud gathering toward the sunset. In any case we were going in a direction that would bring us nearer to it, if it was a steamer heading S. and E.

About eleven o'clock I was awakened from an uneasy sleep by Casmyth shaking my arm and whispering, "There's a steamer bearing down on us, I can hear her engines, but I can see nothing of her." The night was pitch-black, except for starlight, no moon. Our excitement was intense. The crew were chattering softly along the windward side and we were slipping along in a fair breeze.

"Serang," said Casmyth, "get the lamp," ("*batti muncta*"), and we downed sail and sent up the lamp by the mainsail hoist. No good going any further, we would be seen, if at all, by a lamp at the top of the mast. We hauled the lamp up and down at half-minute intervals.

"I can't understand the lack of lights on the steamer," said Casmyth, "and they must be stoking most carefully, unless she is an oil-burner. What is a steamship doing down the Gulf without lights of any kind? I don't like it."

It was a quandary! Safety and new dangers together.

"She may be going away from us and that would hide her port and starboard lights," I said.

"It would not hide her masthead light or her stern light."

"They might have no stern light."

"That's beside the point, she could not have got so near us without our having seen her masthead light, no matter what direction she was going,—I tell you I don't like it one little bit." We discussed the matter hurriedly, and at last I persuaded my friend to continue to signal her in any case, and we could be prepared to back out of the encounter if the ship proved too suspicious on closer examination. He agreed to try it, grudgingly.

After what seemed like hours of pulley-hauling with the lamp—though I daresay it was not more than twenty minutes—we could distinguish a great dark mass against the stars, moving in a southeasterly direction, as far as we could judge, and soon she was within hailing distance. Still no lights, but presently the engines stopped altogether (they had been slowing down for some time past).

We got out our oars, and when all was set for a dash away in the dark, Casmyth stood up and hailed:

"What ship is that? Show a light, we are distressed mariners, schooner *Shah Jehan*, out of Calcutta."

The steamer was almost within stone's throw by now, and at our hail, pandemonium broke loose aboard of her. A light was run up to the masthead and orders began to fly from someone on the bridge in a language I could not follow. And the strangest part of all was that the orders were given in a woman's sweet clear voice. I have often thought of the shock some people on the steamer got at the mention of the *Shah Jehan*. The owner was Viroschand's sister, as you shall hear.

"What the devil is all this?" said Casmyth.

"Hail them in Hindustani," I suggested to Casmyth, and he had just begun to shout, "Captain, *kidder hai!*"

when that lovely voice high up in the dark said, in clear-cut English:

"Wait! we are getting out the gangway on the port side."

We nearly fell out of our boat with astonishment! Lights were now beginning to appear on the port side and we could see laskars busy high above us getting the taffrail away and the gangway cleared (we had paddled quite close now), and soon we had our boat alongside and a boat-hook on the bottom grating of the ladder.

"Stay in the boat," said Casmyth, "serang, follow me." And he climbed up toward that mysterious ship's deck, saying, "Well, this isn't the Aden-Karachi boat, and I'm damned if I know what it is!"

Waiting for Casmyth at the bottom of the gangway, with the black water rushing between our boat and the steamer (a big ship like that keeps way on a long time) was the most uncanny experience of my life. I racked my whole past in the East for an experience that would throw some light on our situation. I could find no parallel,—it was gorgeous,—but too breathlessly so.

I remember trying to find words to fit, and "gorgeous" was the only one that helped in any way. I had just decided that no words of mine could begin to meet my need when the golden bell of a voice from the bridge high up in the dark blue night, cried:

"Won't you come up, Mr. Warburton?"

Well, we all act like fools if the right spring in us is gently pressed.

I was out of the stern sheets and going up that gangway as if that lovely voice had been a silken noose dropped gently under my armpits. I committed one of the greatest crimes known at sea, under the stimulus of a beautiful note in a woman's voice (but you never

heard that voice and so all this must be incomprehensible to you)—I suppose I responded to a hint of distress in those vibrant flutings. What actresses all women are!

Of course I was trussed up the moment I reached the deck, gagged too.

It was some comfort to see Casmyth in the same plight in the cabin to which I was quickly carried. I shall never forget his face at sight of me. I thought he would burst blood-vessels; the knots of impotent anger stood out on his forehead like the bark of an old tree. I could only shake my head and cast my eyes aloft, trying to indicate that siren on the bridge.

"Siren" is right; she was the loveliest and the most ruthless woman I ever met, East or West, North or South.

In about twenty minutes a smart Eurasian steward came in with a magnum of Moët and three glasses, and the siren came in just behind.

Well—I wish I had skill in speech—but I haven't, so I must deal with our hostess in prose.

That woman (girl she had been quite recently) was the very embodiment of the amazing voice we had heard in the night—she was all the beauty of the world—that woman—let it go at that.

She stood in the doorway, with one little golden shoe on the brass fender, with a hand stretched out as if to welcome us; silhouetted against the night by the brilliant electrics of the cabin, like a figure from a Greek vase and with as delicate draperies to half hide, half insist upon her loveliness.

"Forgive me," she said (I forgave her before she got any further) "my situation renders—er—precaution imperative."

Without more words she unfastened our lashings and gags and poured out the wine, as the ship's engines

started. Casmyth put his arm around his head on the table and sobbed softly. The siren looked at me and said, "I understand he has lost a crew and ship by neglect, let him cry. I wish I could cry sometimes, like that, but I suppose I can't have everything."

"And our crew?" I said.

"Happy on board, and your boat at the bottom of the gulf these ten minutes gone."

Cleopatra and I drank together silently; the silence in that cabin was oppressive.

And then Casmyth looked up like a man who suddenly decides to evade sorrow by some terrible activity. He squared toward me and said,

"Do you know what you have done this night?"

"Too well," I replied.

"You will be turned out of hell for this!"

"Perhaps, but please recollect you are in the presence of a lady."

"Lady be damned," he roared, and ripped out a curse, but he never got further than "bit"—for a bullet snicked the tip of his ear.

We were all on our feet in the swirling smoke then, our hostess was standing with a smoking automatic in her hand, her eyes blazing and her whole body tensed, like a cobra ready to strike. Slowly the blazing fire died out of her and she flung the pistol on the table.

"I am sorry, Captain Casmyth," she said. "Please don't force me to do that again. Mr. Warburton, will you try to induce your friend to listen quietly while I explain my situation."

I merely shook my head and looked away from Casmyth—I could not face him.

"Captain Casmyth," she said, turning to him, "will you listen to me five minutes by the clock? I promise to put you to sea in one of my own boats if you are still dissatisfied at the end of that time."

I shall never forget the delicious urgency of that appeal, I could have listened to her for the rest of my life if she had used that way with me.

After a few moments he looked at our hostess and said,

"Well, let me hear what you have to say."

She threw up her little shapely head with the great mass of hair over-weighting the back, and said:

"First, I must tell you who I am, although it will be difficult. I am a descendant of Alexander the Great."

"Excuse me, Madam," he replied, "may I ask you why you are now so far from home? Alexander came through Afghanistan and the Khybar Pass."

"Captain, my mother was the King's Persian wife and came with the collateral army through Kurmanistan and down the Persian Gulf. Do you intend to listen or do you not!"

Her eyes were blazing again, and I put my ragged sleeve over the pistol, and quietly gave Casmyth one on the shin under the table.

"I beg your pardon," said Casmyth. "I do,—I'll be as good as my word, but please stick to necessary facts."

Well,—Helen, Ninon, Cleopatra, Sappho,—or whatever she was (all the lot, maybe) leaned over and spoke all the winged words man ever heard—St. Chrysostom!—how she enfolded us in appeal! She knew every susceptible chord in a man's body and could make sweet melody on it if she chose.

She must have been speaking for over an hour before I noticed what had happened; the bottle was empty, we had finished the lot, and Casmyth had drunk with us without knowing it.

"So you will join me, and I will write to my brother and tell him I have saved you; he will be glad."

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She had made this amazing coincidence clear in her appeal.

"With all my heart," he replied [Oh, Captain!] "my only regret is that I so cruelly misjudged you when I came on board."

"Excellent," she replied, "let me ring for more wine." She drank like a fish, that woman.

## CHAPTER VII

### WE BECOME OPIUM SMUGGLERS

The next morning I awoke in a luxurious cabin with the steward holding a cup of tea at my bedside. I needed it.

The ship was racing, I could tell by the vibration; it was almost like a note, so rapid was the beat.

"We are clipping along, steward," I said.

"Yess, sair" (*chi-chi*, Eurasian talk).

"Soon be in Aden, what?"

"Yess, sair."

"Or Karachi?"

"Yess, sair."

Nothing doing in the information line here. I felt a fool then, and knew I had been one last night. I didn't even know which leg of a seventeen-hundred-mile course we were on. Broad daylight made my overnight romantics look like ten cents.

Come to think of it, I did not know that we were even on the Aden-Karachi line at all—we might be heading for Honolulu, for all I knew, and we wouldn't be very long getting there at the rate the ship was traveling. And, I sighed, I was so happy last night! That general impression remained clear, though much of the detail was hazy.

"Bath! *Muncta!*" said I to the steward, who was solemnly laying out the most appalling rags I ever remember looking at, my only garments, too.

"Yess, sair," said the steward and went on to the

bathroom, turned on water, and fiddled with soap and sponges.

"Are you my personal steward?" I sang out.

"Yess, sair."

Can't the fellow say anything but "yess, sair"? Well, I'll bowl him out middle stump this time. I'll stop his "yess, sair."

"Steward!"

"Yess, sair."

"Send the barber to me."

"Yess, sair."

The blighter had me stone cold! for in walked a pukka barber inside two minutes. I was still in bed, for obvious reasons, and there I was shaved! What a wonderful thing it is to lose a week's beard! I felt like a new-born babe after that and a cold tub. Then I had a hot bath and a cold shower to top off.

My clothes had been carefully brushed, what there was of them, and I slowly and distastefully put them on. They reminded me of much I would have liked to forget, but they brought me to a state of mind to look squarely at all the events of the last twelve hours. First, my money belt was intact, a rough calculation showed I had not been robbed, anyway.

"Now," I said to myself, "this is some damned gun-running or pearl-smuggling show, for all the glamor our fair friend spun round it last night, and I'll have to take Casmyth in hand right off. He's Irish and very, very susceptible and I've got to keep a steady head and haul him out of this *galère*."

"What's the best way to open the subject?—Aha! I have it! I'll pretend to be the smitten susceptible one, and prod him on to pull me out; he'll never suspect a thing; besides, he's so bull-headed, I believe he would fall for this lovely lady just because he thought I was trying to hold him back."

Full of guile and diplomacy I stepped out of my cabin—nearly into the arms of two stalwart stewards. "Breakfast ready, Sahib," one said, "this way, Sahib." There was a hint of something much too firm for stewards in their polite gestures toward the companion-way.

"Ah, thanks, steward, I'll just take a turn on the deck before breakfast."

"Mem-sahib waiting, Sahib!"

"Oh, it's like that, is it? All right, lead on, dusky ones, I must not keep the lady waiting!"

I did not like this, it was too much like that gagging and pistol business last night. However, I thought there would be enough time for action after breakfast.

In the saloon that lovely woman was waiting, toying with a cup of tea.

"My second," she said as I shook her hand, "I hope you slept well, Mr. Warburton."

"Like the dead," I said.

"Not the dead, surely, it sounds dreadful to have a guest dead abed." (This was the real English article in polite breakfast-table talk, and I found it irresistible, as she meant me to.) Her brilliant good-humor was infectious, also her brilliant beauty and all the rest of her brilliance. She took one's breath away,—that's it,—she took your mental, moral, and spiritual breath away and left you gasping, but glad to breathe the same atmosphere that was about her, and ready and happy to pay any price for only one such breath. I don't know what she wore at that breakfast, it did not matter. I suppose she had laces and jewelry, but they didn't strike you, her own beauty was too dazzling for that.

Heigho! she twisted me round and round, and,—I liked it!

My great scheme about saving my friend was forgotten before the mangoes were off the ice. When he

did appear, in a brand-new spruce suit of (borrowed) sea-faring ducks, he looked every inch the gallant sea-captain.

Radiant doesn't begin to describe the fellow!—Captain from head to heel! Will you believe it, our fair friend had been walking the deck with him for an hour before breakfast,—she was a “fast worker”!

“That's the stuff to give you an appetite” (slap on my shoulder like an elephant-gun going off). “You were slugging in bed in the top of the morning” (another of those awful slaps). “Exercise, my boy, early morning exercise. Bedad, it's the grand thing altogether.”

“Quite, quite,” I said quickly, jumping up with the butter for our hostess, and dodging a shattering wallop that was working up abaft my shoulder-blade.

Heavens! he was getting more Irish every minute! His case was already hopeless, I knew it by experience.

It was a merry meal on that racing ship; all our meals were like that,—I felt glad I threw up the sponge at our first breakfast. “Such slices of gallant living don't come the way of a solid business-man more than once,” I thought. I don't believe I should have succeeded in ever bringing my friend out of the clouds he was riding so happily. I should only have darkened my face with churlish stupidity at the best. Those two were born for each other,—they told me so frequently during the ensuing days. Perhaps they were right. If two people believe a thing like that, sincerely, with all the force such characters possess, they *are* right, and all the rest of the world is wrong, no matter how it asserts the contrary opinion. But they weren't right, you know, as I must drearily explain.

I don't expect to be believed, but I was informed soon after the cigarettes were brought in that those blessed people had only been in their cabins for an hour

or so; they had walked the deck all the night (hand in hand, I suppose—their eyes were locked even while they told me this).

I was also informed with much mirth that I had become very sleepy and had gone off to bed soon after the second bottle of wine had arrived the night before, and also that I had promised the steward who showed me to my cabin a gold watch as big as a saucer.

Well, I am not so young as I used to be, at least ten years older than Casmyth, and they were probably right. Sleep becomes important in middle age, worth the largest of gold watches at times and that night was one of them.

After a walk on deck we all went into the chart-house and Casmyth sat on the settee, as Captain, indeed. We, the lady and I, took the chairs he bowed and waved us to.

"Phew!" I said to myself, "this thing is advancing with a vengeance."

I knew something startling would happen soon and I braced myself for it.

I got a facer!

"Warburton," my friend began, "I have been asked by our hostess, who is the owner of this ship, to take over command, and after much serious thought I have decided provisionally to do so. [Oh, Captain! much?] As you are aware, there were several grave matters that stood in the way of my immediate acceptance, and I shall name them in order of their importance to me.

"One was my duty to our owner, Viroschand. The claims of my friendship to you. My duty to the crew of the *Shah Jehan*. I claim the Irishman's privilege of proceeding backwards, for the third objection I can dispose of at once.

"I can now tell you that I mustered our crew this morning and explained the whole matter to them in

the presence of this lady, and they unanimously and heartily agreed to sign on for the present cruise with me.

"The third objection may be bracketed with the first [this did not sound like Casmyth to me, much too clever and specious reasoning], for my duty to my owner is clearly to utilize the personnel of his late ship to the best advantage, till I can discharge them in proper form. I may add that Viroschand's interests and those of this lady coincide in a most fortunate degree, as you already know, and I won't enlarge on that just now, as I wish to hasten on to what is really the most important objection of all, if I were at liberty to consult my own personal wishes, that is. I come to objection number two."

He turned on me here and the lady let me have a glorious dark-eyed broadside.

"Now, dear man, we suggest you combine business with pleasure [a shrewd blow, this]. The profit of the business I can answer for, and we ask you to take a managing share in our present enterprise for you are now on your way home to Calcutta, which is our last port of call."

I admired our lady that morning, she had a head for affairs,—she never said a word. She had got my friend tuned and set for her own sweet melody and knew better than to expose the works. But wasn't she a "swift worker"!

Well! The long and the short of it was that we were opium smugglers and had a cargo of rice, cottonseed and tea as the overt reason for trading; that a considerable part of the cargo had already been discharged on the Arabian side of the Gulf, and that the rest was to be put ashore when it was necessary to cover our opium consignments round the whole of the Indian Peninsula in accordance with very skilful arrangements

with local native agents at Dwazka, at Goa, Calicut, Cochin, Pondicherry, round Ceylon, and up the coast to Calcutta.

Smuggling, rank wholesale smuggling!

And here was my friend, an ex-Merchant Service man, bewitched into enthusiastic partnership in an enterprise no better than bootlegging.

Personally I have very little sympathy with the extremists of the West, who think with such easy intolerance of the occasional pill of opium an Indian takes, after standing up to his thighs, maybe, in the mud of paddy-fields for days together, in a blinding rain that beats the heart out of you.

This is where most of the opium goes, in India, and will go till man stops eating rice. Opium has its tragedies, just as alcohol and dyspepsia and incontinence have, I know. But India needs opium just as the men in the late trench warfare needed rum, and any man who has lived in the East knows India *will* have it, and I am a little indifferent how she gets it.

But smuggling opium wholesale as a private enterprise, I found a big mouthful to swallow at first.

It's the most dangerous work east of Suez, the penalties for being caught are excessively severe, apart from the chance of being shot up on sight; and even if you get out of the penalties with a leg up from a clever Mohammedan lawyer (and there are some that can make Europeans look about as dumb as clams), there is always a stigma that sticks like glue. You would be blackballed in any decent club in the Peninsula on the day after you were acquitted.

Well, I had that girl-woman's hand on my arm when I was trying to think!—But what's the use, it wasn't your arm and you know nothing about the legendary golden girls of the East!

How could I think? Casmyth seemed to be on one

side and Viroschand on the other, and my sense of duty in between, blindfold and bound; I stared at the shiny black leather cushions of the settee before me. The humming of the wind in our wire-rigging rose into a clear sustained note, high and thin. The brilliant reflections from the ship's stream-line flashed on the white enamel of the cabin ceiling, and hurt my eyes, so that I put up my hand as a shade. That gentle pressure on my arm seemed to grow warm and send a grateful glow through all my veins, and it was then I had another of those queer, mysterious visitations from Viroschand!

He came quite close to me and said as plain as ever I heard mortal man speak, "Turn back," just those words and a lifted hand as a sign of warning.

Smack! came Casmyth's hand on my back and I nearly jumped out of my skin, to hear him say, "You're a great thinker, old man; come and think for us, we need you."

What would you have done?

That specter of Viroschand was too much; I'm not a man to be frightened by a liver attack.

I went.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ON BOARD THE "RANEE JEHANGIR"

That ship was the—er—what was it my office-boy said about my new car the other day? "The cat's whiskers."

She was an oil-burner and could do twenty knots without getting the chief engineer's pipe out of his mouth, and more when she did. That engineer was a genius, half-negro, half-Chinese, and if the mixture runs to his sort normally, I think New York City could solve a lot of problems by subsidizing a matrimonial agency between Harlem and Chinatown. That engineer was six feet of real manhood. He was trained in the shops on the Clyde, where the training is not dear but very, very pukka. Of course it was the Chinese half that helped him to stand that poisonous Scotch climate, a full-negro would have died of misery in the first winter. He did not look like an Asiatic in the least, indeed he looked more as my own brother did when he came back from a ten years' spell in Hongkong. He dressed smartly, off duty, read a tattered collection of the "Scientific American" and smoked an old briar pipe incessantly. He was reserved naturally and our advent seemed to intensify his natural taciturnity.

He adored our owner, but who on that ship didn't, from the half-caste skipper downwards?

The ship had papers out of Goa, you must understand, where papers are easy to get, they were perfectly in order, too. It was a happy ship, the whole crew seemed to delight in painting, polishing and scrubbing

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till it looked like one of those big yachts in the East River near 38th Street. I never saw so many white cotton pipeclayed hand-lines in my life. Our serang told me the crew's quarters were like "bungalow bed *khana*, Sahib," and that's a Malay sailor's dream of good quarters.

They weren't badly driven on that ship, but I've seen that little lady with a landing party, and believe me, they earned their living on those occasions; flinching, or hanging on the slack meant worse than death; she would take her slipper and beat them with the heel till they wept like children. It's black shame for any Asiatic to be touched by a woman's slipper in any case. A heap she cared (if the Custom's men were after us) what shame her crew suffered.

Our method of working contraband into port was the most ingenious thing that I ever saw. There is a steady trickle of contraband salt into India, from all sorts of sources, and to moderate it there is a fleet of feluccas, smart lateen-sailed country boats like small Nile barges, and these feluccas patrol the whole coast line of India in a leisurely but very efficient way.

We carried one of these feluccas, an exact replica of the pukka variety, we had Salt and Excise papers all complete to show what we were doing in the district. The trick only failed to work on one occasion, and that I am coming to. It is only necessary to say here that our perfection of technique was the reason, strange as that may sound.

Up to the present the Portuguese skipper had done the Salt-and-Excise-officer stunt but his nerve wasn't up to the job. Our lady of course was "the wife" in the case, taking a trip for her health on the felucca when occasion arose; you can imagine her joy at get-

ting us that dark night off Maskat, we must have seemed to her like help direct from Heaven, with that load of opium to get rid of. Time was everything to her, it was holding the lid on a hissing mine to try and keep that stuff under hatches for more than a few months.

The fine points about the felucca business were the bireme arrangement of oars below decks; the sails were chiefly camouflage. Do I make the matter clear?

It was this way. We would be sighted some calm sultry day at the mouth of a river or rann or gulf, or away in the offing some evening near a harbor, and everybody on shore said, "Oh! the Salt and Excise boat; poor wretches, they'll be grilling there till the morning," and never gave us another thought. As a matter of fact, as soon as dark set in, out came the twin banks of oars on each side, and we were up the river to our agent without a sound or a light, and miles away before the night was out. A motor of any sort would have given the whole show away,—you know how sound travels over water. Now do you see?

And that is the sort of thing I did for many joyous weeks. It's no good talking about ethics; we are all born smugglers, more or less; I don't suppose there is one person who reads these very words who can lay hand on heart and say, "I never got past a Custom official with a thing undeclared."

Some little thing of no great value, perhaps, but something, and ethics have nothing to do with quantity, it's the principle that is vital.

In my place you would probably have done exactly as I did then. I must say this for myself, I was sincerely anxious to stay by my friend. I knew he was bewitched by the "strange woman," as the best man may be, once in a lifetime. I believed he needed my help and I eventually came to the place where I was

able to save him. Not from her. I was never able to do that, but from himself when the time came for him to lose her. I was able to save him from the most dreadful of all human fates, that of death by his own hand.

Casmyth is now a pilot at one of the Gulf ports. This work is no more interesting than my own present employment in New York. Every one knows what a shipping clerk has to do and what his prospects are. Yet we are both content. We know that we have learnt the lesson that life meant us to learn, individually, and that we gallantly went through with these adventures into which we forced our way in the past. Our adventures were in a measure an illicit employment, but we learnt our lesson well, just the same. In his letters to me there is an increasing note of happiness, as if he realized that all the material wealth we once had and lost, was of less moment than the personal discovery of the truth, in terms of one's own experience, that the greatest treasure of all is a quiet contented mind in a middle-aged body. Such are they who return to Vishnu, hardly escaping from Siva, the destroyer, returning to order from turbulence.

I have yet to show that I was totally unaware how far my contact with the East had undermined my solid Western sense. I looked at easily achieved success in commercial enterprise and judged it by vitiated Western standards, failing to realize that I was using and abusing my Western powers upon Eastern material and opportunities, pluming myself on an easy triumph over ignorant opponents. I have always loved a gallant commercial forlorn hope, the spirit at the base of most commercial success, despite all the talk of organization and business instinct. I persuaded myself that opium smuggling was the forlorn hope of our affairs. Most business men can justify their audacity in commerce by the knowledge that their opponents have

an equal chance of discovering which side of the game is holding the winning cards. I was dealing first and last with opponents who did not and could not have my knowledge, exploiting their ignorance and calling it commercial enterprise. I justified my shoddy gambling by labeling it commercial gallantry and found too late it was common easy ruthlessness. Opium smuggling really came in proper sequence to my deterioration. In a measure, too, I must show that Casmyth's mistaken sexual gallantry was his undoing. It was his plain duty to run from that adventuress, who combined the mysterious Eastern feminine allure with modern Western comradeship. Or at least it was his duty to recognize and avoid the consequences of union with her. The test came to him in a form that appealed to his own native gallantry, and he succumbed. His personal interest in the money side of our enterprise was never great; he scoffed at my absorption in those very practical matters frequently, humorously, even while he assisted me. His flaw of character was discovered at the touch of the right kind of temptation, just as mine was.

I do not wish to infer that there was anything raffish about his love; there was not. He loved that lady sincerely and deeply, but it is as much a defect of character to give love with a blind indifference to inevitable and obviously disastrous consequences, as it is to withhold love when it is most eminently fitting and fair in all its prospects.

He had great and fine qualities, and his defect was a gallant one. How gallant he was will be seen in the whole-hearted enthusiasm with which he flung himself into that horrible treasure-hunt on the edge of the great Indian Desert. He threw off his personal grief and sorrow like a blooded horse responding to a call on its last energies. There was no more thrusting at my too

convenient ethical views, none of the spurious, boisterous enthusiasm he poured out so lavishly on Viroschand for my sake, at the beginning of the Gulf enterprise. That treasure was plain honest gain and to be got in a plain downright honest fight with natural forces, the sailor's heritage in honorable foes. Yet he trespassed beyond Vishnu's domain, and Siva laid violent hands on him for taking love out of All Order.

I shall only hint in the future at the fatally conflicting forces that assailed Viroschand's gallant soul—the coarse Western practical sportsmanship and the fine self-destroying altruism of the Indian. As I have said, he is the only hero in this book; his gallantry was the veracious article. He did not succumb, even when East and West combined in an assault on him in the most insidious form of attack that is possible, with defeat holding the lash of dishonor that can be evaded by a compromise with self alone, for no one but himself could see the dishonor in the evasion he was asked to make. He preferred death, so he died as gallantly as he lived. As for our lady,—you know my philosophy—no man is fit to judge any woman. Who would stick a pin through a lovely but inconvenient butterfly that settled near his hand? Not I! So I shall be more than her apologist. Vishnu took his own to himself. Siva had no hand in that. Viroschand's character was far too complex to deal with in the explicit Western way. I mean, apart from the complexity that arose in his business. I have hinted that he was a Marwari by adoption into the caste, and I must continue to give hints of his character chiefly by showing his reaction on my own.

My development you will trace by my own admissions of faults appreciated as I became able to recognize them, and by the methods I employed in

the circumstances into which I forced my way, blind to everything except immediate and excessive gain.

As for Casmyth's character, let me say at once that for a sailor he should have been far simpler, in motive and in spiritual reaction, and truly I think that lovely lady dragged up to the surface of him all the complexity that a sensitive artistic temperament drills into proper subordination by following the discipline of the sea from early childhood.

Much against my own wish, and chiefly in justice to the great sea tradition that bred my friend, I must try to place before you the character of that lady who involved him in such unscrupulous sea-faring.

She cast the mysterious Egyptian leaves into the wine-cup in which she offered herself as a draught. She may be forgiven, for being whole-hearted.

She had a great deal of character, but it was all tainted. Virtue gone bad would be nearer the mark. Let me be fair; her unscrupulous acquisitiveness I do not count a vice (as I have learnt to do in my own case). In her country it would be applauded as a virtue in a person of her rank. What she wanted, she was in the habit of taking, and always had done so. *Meum et tuum* simply did not exist, where all was her's by right. So let that part of her go. She was not called Uma Durga for nothing.

The whole of her girlhood had been spent in the company of a companion, tutoress, governess or whatever she may termed, who was essentially so inimical to development on traditional feminine lines that it is a wonder to me that our lady was no worse when we found her. That companion was the daughter of an Irish-American adventurer; educated at one of the big Western women's colleges, a brilliant and beautiful girl, with all the bravery of a man and the modern distaste for hampering skirts.

A character that had to have incessant danger or some other stimulant to provide an incentive to the continuance of life. When youth could no longer gain her admission into the stimulating physical adventures she loved, she substituted the stimulus of drink and taught our lady that trick of evading boredom, before she died of it. Siva reapeth plentifully in this field, all over the world.

It seems that this companion of our lady's early years (after a meteoric metropolitan career)—had spent the remnant of her fortune in organizing an Eastern exploring party. The party was wrecked, chiefly by reason of the leader's drunken habits, and she was abandoned on the confines of Kurmanistan, taken down toward the plains by kindly Indians and befriended by our lady's parents, eventually becoming her companion and mentor.

The companion had intended to trace out the route of the greatest expeditionary force in the world's history, with a side interest if possible in Greco-Macedonian antiquarian treasure. The line of march of Alexander the Great is in exactly the same state today as it was all those hundreds of years ago. There are no railways from Asia Minor to India, despite our pride in the advance of civilization throughout the globe. There are no more roads than existed in Alexander the Great's time, fewer perhaps, and the dangers are precisely the same that wrecked that mighty effort of those godlike men.

How strange is life! I penned these words many years ago, and as I revised them tonight sitting in the Pennsylvania Station, waiting with my brother for a train to Cleveland, he pointed to a paragraph in an evening paper stating that an official American expedition was in process of organization for the very same purpose that thrust our lady's companion into

the vast unknown between the Thibetan and the Great Desert. I had just pulled the bundle of ragged MS. out of my pocket and was softly slipping into the mysterious "East of Suez" land, where I really live still and shall do till I die, when my brother snapped me back to America.

"There," said my brother, "you see, they're on to your stuff—you'll miss the market yet. And what is more, there's a woman at the back of it all, to start that American expedition off into the blue." He was right—and wrong. There will be many women at the back of many expeditions before America can fathom the mystery of that greatest of all military tragedies. "No I shall not miss my market, brother," I replied.

He smiled and let me go back to the happy drudgery of minimizing the "I said's" and "Said he's" that seem to make up the bulk of my literary labors.

He has some respect for my present work and more for my past, being a born adventurer himself, but a most desperate affair in early youth forced him to map out a permanent way through the rest of his life, that his wife and babies might have a place to lay their heads at night.

I knew I need not even excuse myself to him for returning to my precious screed, and so I soon slipped back into the warm mirage that contains the stranded adventurers who impinged so disastrously on our lady's early years. Such an influence in such an environment could only lead to the most exceptional results in maturity. Our lady took to pearl poaching and opium smuggling as certainly as the convent Catholicism of the priests leads to Rome. We are the creatures of the conversations of our friends, that is the medium in which we develop, like cultures. Our lady was only an example of intensive stimulus in a favorable cultural medium.

She embraced the incidence of Casmyth (I intend no levity), and perverted him as naturally and simply as she acquired all the other means to achieve her rather unscrupulous ends, that she might indulge in an ever-increasing acquisitiveness. She closed his eyes, as Vishnu opened mine. She acquired his love without a thought of consequences.

Well! This is not a love-story. Casmyth could write one that would make the world sing as it has not sung since Sappho set it lilting. He won't though, for his subsequent sufferings went beyond the point where they are capable of expression as human experiences.

Beauty is created just before that blazing fire reaches the consuming point. Casmyth was burnt out in the intensity of the contrast between joy and sorrow.

It has been my lot to meet several poets, both before and since those days, and I know—they know—that they are only saved to sing of love by their capacity for subjective relationship to that fiery experience. Casmyth was not a poet (though sensitive enough to love like one) and he was consumed in the fire that sprang up around him and claimed him as sacrifice and priest of the altar, all in one.

Yes, she got him body and soul and there was little left when she had done with him. One spark blazed out of the embers, as I have said, when I blew it forth on the last throw we made with fortune after we sank the *Ranee* in the Red Sea, with gun-boats hard on our wake. But that was only a momentary glow; she had all the substance of the man's body, soul and spirit, and took it with her to the bottom of that most mysterious tide that lies between Christendom and all the far lands of the Magi.

I thank God love never took me that way; I am not

made for such love, for it was that indeed, as I can testify, and I shall go down in this history as the giant gooseberry of the piece, the innocuous *tertium quid*, the unnecessary base of the sufficient triangle rooted firmly in earth. Well, so be it. I admit I was happy in that relationship. You never saw the East and the West mixed so vividly in a woman, like that, so I can support your easy scorn. You know, somewhat, of the magnificence of Viroschand, and she was his half-sister. They were parted as children, when the new wife ousted the old, in the immemorial Eastern way. The boy Viroschand clung to his mother and defied his father to hinder or hold him. The mother (still young by Western standards) and the boy slipped out together one night from that mountain town, and the whole tale of suffering that ended in Calcutta can only be told in the East; it is credible there. The mother was too proud to support a relationship that is as common in her native land as birth and death. She must have been the one rare exception to Eastern custom that proves its incidence.

Her brave independence caused her death, for she was found by the boy, dead, with her throat cut from ear to ear, one morning as he came back from gathering the scraps in the bazaar that would support them for the day. The pair had been marked down, tracked, and sold for the price of a debauch in the kennels of Calcutta, doubtless.

Young Viroschand never went back. He knew better, young as he was. All this he told us after we had returned from the Gulf. One day we were waiting in those appalling vakeel's offices at the back of the Law Courts. The dreary day had to be got through somehow, and we had not spoken for so long. We had gone over our case again and again till there was nothing left to discuss. A fit of shaking like the beginning of fever

had taken hold of me, but it was not all fever, it was fear of the future. All men who have lived too dangerously know this waiting ague, even soldiers whose trade is danger. It is nerves too far stretched to ever regain their elasticity. To quiet me and interest me Viroschand began by saying, "Sahib, all things are comparative, as I know better than most men. Listen, Sahib! As soon as my poor sister (he always called our lady so) came into this world, I knew my manhood was come upon me. I knew that the bitterness of disappointment at the birth of the child all wished to be a boy, would be visited by this new wife on me, and on my mother. I determined at once to play the man thenceforth, not for my own sake, but for the sake of the mother that bore me, who had eaten the bread of bitterness nigh a year." Then he slowly unfolded the tragedy that ended only when he sought shelter with the servants of the house of a kindly Marwari, near the bazaar. The servants hid him for weeks till the heat of the pursuit was over, and then, as he said, "It was my fortune to find favor in the eyes of the wife of the Marwari, a childless woman, but the light of her old husband's eyes. I had expected to be hounded from the house with a harshness greater than that of my father's new wife, but see how light breaks through at the darkest place when God wills it so. The young wife and the old Marwari took me as their son, and were united thenceforth in promoting my welfare, as happily as if I had been their very own. I seemed to them a seal on the joy they had in each other, the son that they could not have had in nature, for neither were well favored in face or person. As unlike the mighty man who was my father and the fairest of women who was my mother as the sun and moon are unlike the lanterns of a Gunpatti festival. Have no fear, Sahib! I know you need have no fear of the future, for often help

comes only when we see no escape of our own contriving."

I have not told more than is necessary to indicate the sort of mother our lady had. Even she had nothing but contempt for a mother who had no thought but to hold a man by the snares with which she originally trapped the father. She told us that the old chieftain turned from her mother, in belated remorse at the loss of his only son, and words can then scarcely do justice to the home that comes into existence under such circumstances in the East.

It is easy to see how gladly a young mind would fall under the sway of a companion that had, or seemed to have, the secret of independent happiness. How carefully every habit and gesture would be noted and copied, how a naturally lawless tendency would soon become an incurable habit under such tuition.

When we met our lady she was at the height of the development of mind and spirit that could look upon every force countering desire as only a fit object for trickery or scornful flouting. Governments and established order were mere words to such advanced megalomania.

The contact was made when I had become reckless and desperate through frustrated commercial adventuring. Originally of only a doubtful kind, it started me on the trail of easy money, and the further frustration of my schemes by seeming accident, led me into actual law-breaking with but little compunction. I was ripe for it. I had turned myself in the sun of easy circumstances achieved by brief efforts, and I found little difficulty in seeing opium smuggling in the gallant light I desired to see it in, that is, as a rapid and easy road to affluence for those who could swallow a few scruples.

I do not wish to infer that I had no scruples at all.

I had at first, but the ease with which I swallowed them is the clearest indication of the difference between myself and Viroschand. He had difficulty in countenancing our harmless table waters. How much more difficult it must have been for him to tolerate our opium trafficking?

Strangely enough, I could not let my friend Casmyth be engulfed so easily. I confess I had some timid vicarious qualms on his behalf; the old sea tradition that I knew had meant so much to him for so many hard years of fine service, I couldn't see opium smuggling and that together, somehow. I might have spared myself the trouble. Ethics, Indian or Western, never entered his head. His all-consuming passion blinded him completely to scruples of conscience. I guessed that too, dimly, but for that very reason, I only determined to stand more firmly by my friend. What I meant by "standing by him" I was not quite clear about then. I know, now that I have had time to think it all out, that it meant that I would try to provide one cool head in the party when disaster loomed, and that perhaps I should be able to help all to evade the inevitable consequences of our own hardy folly. Meaning also that I meant to keep a careful eye on the plums of our plundering and duck out with them, too, if I saw half a chance.

Casmyth cared little for the wealth we got so easily and in such quantities, nor did she, once the excitement of getting it was over, and she cared nothing for the morrow, and came to care little for today if she had not Casmyth's love from dawn to dusk.

You will see how little all my small cares mattered in the end, that is, as far as helping the party goes.

I was a mean peddling little profit-snatcher when I started in on that opium smuggling game. I came out something different. As to whether I am a better

man or not you shall judge for yourself at the end of this book. I know I haven't changed much—radically—but I am determined to avoid henceforth all environments that have shame and disaster at their center. It was not necessary to suffer reincarnation to achieve that wisdom, all Indian philosophy to the contrary. Siva lifted his hand from me at the appointed time and Vishnu permitted me to renew association with ordered things, also at the appointed time. But I take to myself the credit for arriving at the determination to steer clear of *all* doubtful commerce, and that includes the people who engage in such occupations.

## CHAPTER IX

### BALUCHISTAN AND KHALAT

I have indicated roughly our method of running a parcel of opium and I hinted how we once nearly came to grief through the very perfection of our technique. It happened in this way. It was our custom to accept payment in stones—rubies, emeralds, etc., the sort of thing that can always be dug up in India for anything that is really an Indian need. We usually tried to get gold, or gold jewelry, which is always nearly pure gold, for the native craftsmen won't perform their miracles of design in untractable alloys with a low percentage of gold. Sometimes there was nothing but stones, mostly uncut, forthcoming in payment and the difficulty of appraising their value was constantly causing friction. Mrs. Casmyth (our lady became that soon, and I might as well begin to give her the title now)—had an unerring gift for valuation and with a little more suavity could usually have got her price accepted. The opium had to be bought, you understand, the agents ached to the end of their four bones to get their fingers on it, and they were only the voice of the vast dumb body of people behind them, that hungered for it with a craving that is beyond all appeal to reason or respect for law.

Mrs. Casmyth wouldn't haggle, that was not her way in anything, so sometimes there were some disappointed, disgruntled agents left in the dawn as we pushed them ashore and threw their parcels of stones after them, hastening to be gone before day caught us.

It was on one such occasion that disaster nearly overtook us and decided us upon a radical change in our methods of operation. We had run up as far as the border of Baluchistan because we heard that the Rajah of Khalat was there and naturally there would be plenty of money or valuables wherever he was with his hordes of servants and court retinue. We had run up a creek in the early part of the night and, as we expected, the gold and jewels were there awaiting us in plenty. Everyone was easily satisfied except one ruffian (a scarred old veteran), who had only uncut diamonds to offer, nothing especially big either, and he would not accept Mrs. Casmyth's valuation. When everyone was ashore and we had the last gangway up, this old tough was discovered still aboard. We were actually moving downstream at the time, and when I found him I went to Casmyth at the tiller and said, "Hold up, we've got a passenger!" He called softly to the rowers to ease up, but Mrs. Casmyth flew out in a rage and ordered two deck hands to fling the man overboard at once.

The hands ran at the old rip without a second's hesitation, when to our consternation he knocked them flat on the deck, and broke out, in fair enough English, with, "No good Sahibs, you! No good Sahibs! I tell Commishnah (Commissioner) Sahib you badmashi on Sirkhari ship!" roughly translated being, "You are fraudulent sahibs and I will tell the commissioner you are up to no good with this Government ship."

Mrs. Casmyth's rage became ungovernable and before we could stop her she had picked up a light crowbar and felled the old man to the deck.

Now here was our difficulty: that old warrior must have recently quitted (or was still in) British service—for it is rare that Baluchis retain their command of English, long after immediate and constant contact with it. Why, I do not know, but it is so. It was also safe

to assume that the man's master was not far off, perhaps his master was a political agent, even now at the court of Khalat in this very neighborhood. Our situation was extremely precarious.

It was quite obvious we had overdone the disguise with our felucca. It should never have had such a special character. If this old scoundrel could recognize the Government rig of our boat, then we were marked all down the coast, the "dhobi mark" (slang, roughly, "the initials on washing"), was on us!

Our immediate danger was that the same information which this unwelcome guest divulged might also be in the possession of his master in the neighboring districts (anything in India that is not a large town, is somebody's district,—civil, military, P.W.D. Revenue, etc.), in which case we might be trapped at any moment.

Two courses were possible—take the old ruffian up the coast and land him; or keep him for good, or at least as long as we were working the Gulf.

We decided on a mixture of the first and last courses, keep him if we could and land him if we must.

Strangely enough, we need not have worried a bit about the matter; that old scoundrel became our ablest lieutenant and general landing-master; he took service with us as soon as it was offered and stayed with us till we left the Gulf and went to Goa. We were right, and wrong, about his master. He was in the neighborhood, just a few miles inland from the creek, in fact, but he was an adventurous young American, out here lion shooting.

Rahzan, the ruffian in question, had taken service with the lion hunter in Karachi and was guiding him down to the hunting district. The lion hunter was very indifferent to money in any shape or form, according to Rahzan, who had evidently tried to tempt him from

lions. Rahzan talked incessantly about the legends of treasure in the interior, chiefly to enhance his own reputation as a man of mystery, I suspect. I fancy he got snubbed by the American; Rahzan's willingness to change service all points to that, for Baluchis are not usually unfaithful.

He knew that country backwards, right up to the Great Desert and beyond that. He was a perfect mine of information about the country at the back of that coast, which is the least explored place in the world.

Yet it is a country that has had civilizations as ancient and elaborate as any of which we have definite records, civilizations more ancient than Ethiopia; perhaps the Garden of Eden is only the name of one of its phases. When you realize that the whole of that vast abomination of desolation has running water nearly everywhere at a depth of sixty or seventy feet, it is easy to reconstruct the garden of the world there.

It was from that old warrior that we got definite data of the great treasure of the Desert. But that treasure belongs to another part of this history, so I must leave the matter to its proper place, only saying now that we drew sketch-maps from the old man's descriptions and directions and made careful notes of all he said about the treasure and its location. The old warrior made a map himself eventually and gave it to me. But he didn't do that till we got to know each other almost like father and son. In the early days of our acquaintance he delighted to tease me with vague stories of the treasure he meant to confer on me in his will—we used to make jokes about it, punning on hospitality and diamonds: *Malmas*,—*malmalas*, literally, my salt (i.e. hospitality) was as diamonds, and the other way round, as occasion arose.

Rahzan had never seen the treasure himself, but some kinsman had, "burra time gone," which might

be a hundred years or ten years,—they don't know anything about time after a year or so, those people—and also it might mean that the “kinsman” was himself, if we made it worth his while.

We heard, as everyone does on that coast, of vast treasures on that littoral, somewhere. Vague hints and whiffs of rumors. It might mean much or little; it might refer to the Persian and Syrian loot Alexander the Great jettisoned when he pulled the remnants of his army out of the morass that barred him from Hind. It might be Dravidian, Persian, Mongol, Mohammedan, Mogul, Hindu, or even the remains of some lost regiment of Magdala's days, the mighty man who said “*Peccavi*” when he had—Scind. How like an Englishman, to tell a story wrong end first! He said “*Peccavi*” when he had captured Karachi, for he who holds Karachi “has Scind.” There! Not so bad after all, eh?

He, Lord Napier of Magdala, was a mighty man, as anyone who has seen his portrait in the Sappers' Mess can testify. Beside him Gordon looks like an amateur soldier, and both are fine portraits of fine men. You know, of course, he raised his own army to conquer Scind, after landing in Bombay with five pounds and a Shetland pony. Yes, and then he took it to Scind and laid the whole country in subjection. At the start of the first great battle, one of his Sepahi chiefs was insolent, and he broke the bones of his right wrist felling him to the ground, so he fought all the day with his sword in his left hand. There were giants in those days.

But I must get back to my smuggling. When our old ruffian came to, which he was not long in doing, we were well on the way to the *Ranee*. I had first go at him, and with my usual oily diplomacy (or by happy accident) touched him on the right spot by offering him all the opium he wanted if he would take service

with us. As I have said, he jumped at the chance; all he wanted, really wanted, since his hot youth, was opium and plenty of it. He handed me his little bag of stones on the spot. He said he got the stones in the desert (*burra thar*), waving his hand vaguely north and east. He was close about that, and I always thought he lied when he denied ever having seen the legendary treasure. We never could make him admit it or trap him into an admission about how he got those stones. He only showed a few betel-red fangs and his wicked old eyes screwed up sideways at us as soon as he felt us getting warm on the trail of the treasure or its connection with his uncut diamonds.

He defeated us at cross-examination every time we tried it, so I don't know to this day how he got those stones.

He proved a first-rate boatman, as all those coast people do. They are the most active sailors in the world. He also knew how to value stones to a carat and after last night's experience we decided to let him do that side of our business, vice Mrs. Casmyth. She said at once he could beat her at the game. Fair praise, when you consider the old ruffian's first introduction to her.

The chief value of the old fellow was in rearranging the rig of our felucca, and her general appearance. By the time he had done with her the felucca looked just like any other dirty old country wallah between Basra and Bombay. You never saw such a transformation when it was completed at last! It was just in time, too. But that I did not find out till many years later. It's no secret now and I am not ashamed to admit that the governor of my prison told me—the prison in which I served a term for smuggling after Viroschand, with his quixotic scruples, threw his case away. He, the governor, was an old Navy man and from letters he showed me from service friends, the cruiser *Wildfire* must

have been less than thirty miles away the very night we changed our technique.

Their principle clue was the description (very accurate) of our Salt and Excise turn-out, and the *Ranee* he seemed to know nothing about, judging by the letter. If we had tried another run in that felucca we should have been caught without a doubt and this history would never have been written. But Casmyth and I would have gone to prison just the same, I believe. That spell in prison cost Casmyth his ticket, of course, and that is why he is a mud pilot now. He came to like that old blackguard, Rahzan, and he in exchange taught Casmyth to ride those fast Bikaner camels, magnificent ferocious brutes that, when they start to move, make Arabian and Egyptian camels look like brown snails.

While waiting for the alterations to the felucca we struck out into a border trade between the native States and Baluchistan, which is a Mandatory State, simply landing at a suitable spot on the coast, and trusting to Rahzan to produce camels in the nearest village. He never failed us. We were afraid of getting trapped away up a river mouth or creek in the felucca until our carpenters had carried out Rahzan's ideas of disguise, and you can see for yourself how wise we were to wait. The *Ranee* could put off to sea and disappear into the blue at will, once the necessity for retrieving the felucca was avoided. We were always perfectly contented to melt into the desert life at some oasis if there was no sign of the *Ranee* when we got back from a hinterland adventure, so our activities never excited any suspicion.

I got the desert into my blood then, and if I had stayed there a little longer I don't think I should ever have returned to civilization. It is so difficult to explain the grip the desert gets upon one. There is no

comfort nine-tenths of the time (and it is the hardest life, after the sea, known to man); I can only explain its fascination by saying that the pleasures of the desert, when they do come, are so acutely enjoyed that they make one positively avid of the pains that shall end in such an exquisite sense of contrast.

A little oasis in a desert is so lovely that it seems to justify the vast and sinister aridity around it. Only those who have wept at such a sight while peering through the folds of a head-cloth can fully appreciate my meaning. If any man finds life savorless let him go to the desert and learn the lesson of life again. He will become as a child, gripped anew by the wonder of it.

Most of our traffic was along the Baluchi Border. Baluchistan is too carefully policed by the British for much illicit enterprise. The Baluchi makes a magnificent soldier, and once his loyalty is engaged, I doubt if even opium would corrupt him. That is a big statement, I know, but I believe it to be true, in the main. Rahzan said he would risk a run into any big town we chose to name, but then he would risk anything.

We never tried it. The big game up the creeks was over for the time being, so we stuck to small towns near the border, running small consignments for the most part.

Before those days, I thought I knew something about slavery in India, but I got a shock there. The whole place is run by slavery, of assorted kinds. I read the other day in a New York paper that the Khalat had freed 50,000 slaves, and great was the rejoicing at the end of slavery in those parts, according to the paper. I closed the eye of controlled mirth, and turned to other things. Frankly, I do not see how slavery can be avoided there in some form or other, when you consider the incidence of debt and money-lending, due to the expense

of necessary ceremonial, and its frequency. Take a typical human Indian necessity—a marriage feast. In those parts it must last for several days, for even a low-caste man. Heaven only knows how long a high-caste marriage lasts and what it costs!

Well, the *pater familias* is already deeply in debt, probably paying interest on some of his father's debts, too, or even his grandfather's. What can he do? Duck the expense or try to economize? Not on your life! He might just as well dash his brains out against the nearest wall (as some do in an extremity of financial exasperation); life would be made a living death for him by his neighbors, if he tried it.

The father goes to the nearest schroff like a duck to water and borrows on his capacity to work for the schroff, so many years, on his farm or at his workshop, of course, with the schroff in sole charge of his affairs, with a bare pittance to keep body and soul together. On these terms he gets his loan and without a qualm pours out the lot like water for some elaborate ceremony.

I am now only dealing with the side of the matter which may be called voluntary slavery, the state of affairs that applies more or less to the whole of India from North to South and East to West. Of the actual slave population, born in that state and destined to die therein, I shall not speak. It would be indiscreet if I divulged a half of the truth.

It is no use blinking at facts; India is the poorest country in the world and must support a population of nearly 330,000,000 shackled to a ceaseless round of elaborate ceremonial. They are practically all in debt, always have been in debt, and always will be. They resent interference with their liberty to get into debt, most bitterly; they say they are happier in debt than out of it, so why worry?

The British have spent great sums and wasted numerous valuable lives in moderating extortion throughout the length and breadth of their Indian dominions. I use the word "moderating" advisedly, as you will see, for to attempt anything else is beating the air.

The net result is a bitter animosity on the part of Indians generally at the probing of their domestic affairs. To hale an extortionate lender before justice also means haling numerous acquiescent borrowers to provide the proofs, and then the trouble starts. The borrower knows he is going to get deeper into debt at the first necessity that arises, and nine times out of ten he will perjure himself to the gullet in the interests of the schroff, who is squeezing him to death, and the case simply falls flat. In the few rare cases that go through to a definite conclusion, the wretched creature who testified against the schroff wishes he had had his tongue cut out before such evil councils took possession of him. The schroffs see to that as soon as the case is over.

Well, those people will somehow find money for opium, despite their debts and duns. I knew all this before I was an opium bootlegger,—the indirect crime that is inevitable to opium trafficking, and I know that opium leads to crime directly as well; the bare necessity of producing the original purchasing price leads to crime frequently, and worse crimes still are committed under the influence of the drug in excess.

That was the sort of business I found myself in. The vicious lure of easy money, and the false glamor of raffish gallantry about the scale and scope of our enterprise made ethical ophthalmia seem an amiable defect at the time. If we had got away with it all I suppose I should think so still.

It was a wonderful life and I look back on it now

with regret only for the vicious merchandise we trafficked in, and the consequent moral deterioration for everybody concerned. But you can't have it both ways. I don't suppose for a moment we should have got half the kick out of a traffic in the local dates. There would have been none of those wonderful night expeditions full of mystery; when the earth and sky seemed part of the night and we seemed to melt into all, swaying high on the silent striding camels as they stole softly through the outskirts of a sleeping town, from black shadow to black shadow close to the walls. Such were our arrivals, with the little boxes of vice under our saddle-cloths.

Whoever has had in his nostrils the sharp incense that steals upon the night wayfarer as he sways silently through the outskirts of a desert town, will never be happy till he returns thereto. The nostalgia of a thousand nights of romance whips the senses into an ecstasy of death-defying pride, and the sufficiency of this life's pleasures and triumphs. We had no traffic in other vices, nor felt the call of them, though they seethed around us in the raffish quarters of the receivers we dealt with. The heady wine of desert voyaging and adventure seems nearly enough to fill a man's life.

We had to leave it swiftly.

Our Goanese ex-skipper now gave us our first taste of treachery from within our own organization.

It was folly to leave him on board in sole charge of the *Ranee*. But the desert claimed us in those days, like a new love that longs to be fully satisfied, at once. We sacrificed every sensible precaution to that delicious detention.

And sprang up from it with a stab in the back! I hardly care to relate this incident, it seems too easily miraculous in its successful issue. But as it was the inception of all our troubles on board the *Ranee*, I had

better try, relating it in brief sequence of facts without comment of any kind.

Briefly then, it had come about that in our continued success ashore with Rahzan as organizer, smoother of difficulties, arranger of prices and so forth, we had almost forgotten the felucca until one day he told us that his critical seaman's eye—for he navigated on watery and sandy seas with equal mastery and skill—was satisfied with the labors of our carpenters. She was ready to take the sea once more. We had been living ashore in the little coastal ports all this time, tiny Japanese-garden ports (I mean Japanese in scale) but more truly Indian than anything I have ever seen, as regards immutable character and color and customs.

Up to this time the opium came to us in the *Ranee's* boats, to prearranged spots along the coast outside the port, and we disposed of it at leisure as I have described. Rahzan frequently went back with the *Ranee's* boat and surveyed the progress of the carpenter on the felucca and it was on his return on one such occasion that he informed us of the completion of all the required nautical disguises.

Mrs. Casmyth immediately ordered a "coup" on a grand scale, the sort she loved. That camel-peddling never satisfied her avid thirst for great and easy gain. She was born on the edge of the desert, you must remember, and was not in her first love of it, as we were. Truly I think its restraints, its unceasing discretion in the presence of strangers, gave her little opportunity for forwarding her affair of the heart with Casmyth. She wanted the spacious liberties of her ship, for that soft enterprise.

She had her way of course, as all women do in such affairs.

There is a magnificent estuary just north of the great Gulf of Kutch, with a fair town on it about a mile

inland. That was our objective. We would try out the remodeled felucca there.

We did, and the Goanese skipper nearly got away with the *Ranee* while we were at it! Why he did not achieve it before, I cannot understand. Plans not perfected, I suppose.

There was nothing abnormal at our departure from the *Ranee* nor about our landing up the estuary. The haul was good, heavy parcels and fair prices, in gold mostly, but it was noticeable that certain small dealers were hanging fire in completing their bargains. This is the one case in which Mrs. Casmyth's impatience and abrupt methods of barter turned the tide of our affairs in a fortunate way. She became abusive and arbitrary as usual and ordered the lot off the felucca if they did not close in five minutes. Rahzan was beside himself with frustrated cupidity and nervous apprehension of his violent mistress. He had experienced personally the fate meted out to dilatory business methods on board that ship, and yet his soul loved bargaining, for its own sake. Moreover, he was working up a little scheme of his own to play off all the short-weight parcels against the long-winded arguments of his commercial adversaries. The parcels naturally varied in weight though the boxes were uniform in size. Rahzan knew, to half an ounce almost, the weight in each and meant to pick out all the lightest for his purpose. He confided his little crookedness to me and desired me to approach Mrs. Casmyth with this inducement for delay. Of course I laughed at the old ruffian and declined to have any part in such a matter.

The delayers of bargains were thrust quickly and unceremoniously ashore and we pushed off, while they frenziedly hissed at us that they would pay our price. Too late, we were moving and by God! when I got a night glass on the *Ranee*, she was moving too!

Those wordy chafferers were paid agents of our Goanese skipper to keep us involved while he got away with the steamer. He had been suborning the crew while we were working the Baluchi Border—certain disgruntled members who managed to get themselves left out of the galley-manning of the felucca for the occasion. He had screwed up the chief engineer in his cabin, and had terrified the rest of the engine-room staff with tales of our early doom at the hands of the British Customs. (How did he make such a near shot to the truth as that, I wonder? Some chance word blown across the decks, I suppose, or perhaps happy invention).

He had one heavily subsidized traitor in the felucca, to go ashore in the dark with money and fair words as soon as we arrived at the town. The scoundrel confessed afterwards. The skipper had been dousing lights gradually ever since we left the *Ranee* and as I dashed aft to Casmyth with the news of her movements, the last light disappeared. I lived to thank the Goanese for that trick, later. Casmyth grasped the whole thing in a second. He ordered all deck hands to jettison every single thing that could be thrown off the felucca and cut away our anchors and dingy with his own hands.

I shall never forget that race. I double-banked an oar and so did Mrs. Casmyth. It was not a long race, but good God, what a burst! The chief danger was that someone might miss a stroke and stop our way for a few moments. We never doubted our ability to catch up with the *Ranee* if our luck held as it had started. The Goanese would never suspect that his delaying party had failed, and that we had started back as soon as we did, and he would not force the *Ranee* at first, for fear of the racing screws warning us of his treachery.

In a launch we should never have caught the *Ranee*.

We should have been heard. As it was, I just managed to fling a line with a heavy weight on the end, across the after gangway, which was half up and half down still (just like a Goanese, that!). The weight caught in something and we were soon alongside the steamer and securely hitched.

Mrs. Casmyth fainted in Casmyth's arms.

Or was it an affected piece of femininity, calculated to appeal as such to a sailor?

Mine was the eye that first perceived our danger.

Mine was the arm that flung the rope that saved us.

Not mine the arm that received the fair beauty in her extremity of emotion.

And why not?

(a) Because I am only a tubby little business man, and my friend is a tall gallant sailor.

(b) Because she knew I could keep one small section of my brain coolly detached from the potent spells of all her charms and witchery (at least I like to administer to myself that meager consolation).

(c) Casmyth had long ceased to possess a vestige of (b), i.e. brain.

Now you know.

I was as near to her as Casmyth when she fainted! But why turn the silly wheel of reason round and round when reason has nothing to do with the matter. Let us turn to other things.

There was a sufficiency of them to attend to when we did get Mrs. Casmyth (still swooning gracefully) on deck, and the felucca swung in.

I have to be careful about the rest of this. That Goanese had more nerve than I expected. He surprised even Casmyth into admiration of his hardihood.

The beggar swore he was only lifting the anchors

out of the mud preparatory to circling round for us. He pointed to the gangway (half-way down still) as a proof of his statement. And I am hanged if we could prove our point. We were morally certain of his damnable treachery, but we could not prove it. His cautious half-speed tactics helped him there. Casmyth's fingers itched to be manhandling the lemon-colored swine.

Of course the mate bore out the skipper's story, vociferously; he was a Goanese, like his master; we dropped him as soon as we reached the neighborhood of Dhiu on the Cambay coast.

But the skipper could not get away with flat disobedience of orders, viz., lifting anchors without the pre-arranged signal from us (two flares, one short, one long).

Now by sea law and usage the fellow was still captain of the ship and could not be derated or dismissed by the owner till the conclusion of the voyage. (We were a pretty lot to be chopping straws about sea laws and usage, but we did, solemnly, I assure you). We had ridden rough-shod over him in every principle of command, we had swallowed caravans of camels in fact but we strained at this gnat of sea law, as that clever beggar meant that we should. His eyeballs were switching from me to Casmyth like a shuttle in a weaving machine, during our interview; he thought hard and quickly and saved himself, for that time, by his nimble wit. He had the law all as pat as you please, and as soft as butter-pats. If we didn't stop him soon I could see he would hitch us up in a bight that might end in some violent tragedy, due to Casmyth's Irish temper. We were still in the skipper's cabin, next to the chart-house. We had gone up on the bridge as soon as Mrs. Casmyth was safely in the hands of the stewardess.

I acted quickly.

Casmyth was getting redder in the face every minute and exploded, Pshaw!! when I took him by the arm and dragged him outside.

Now listen to this bit of diplomacy!

I told him Mrs. Casmyth had received a great shock to her nervous system (her nerves were like whipcord,—steel wire) and must be careful for a little. "We can easily deal with him," (nodding my head toward Captain Lemon-peel in the chart-house cabin) "when she has fully recovered."

"Deal with him, DEAL with him! I'll deal with him! I'LL throw him overboard now!"

"Yes, yes," I said, "quite right, but Mrs. Casmyth would probably like to see you do it."

He didn't even see the humor of that!

He merely grunted and said, "Well, I dare say there's something in that."

Quickly seizing my advantage, I continued, "Now, that's right,—think of her,—go and see her now,—she needs soothing."

"What! me! go to her cabin, you're mad!"

"Not at all, perfectly proper; stewardess there, you know, perfectly adequate chaperon!"

"Are you sure? Well, I don't know that I think a black stewardess much of a chaperon, at that?"

(By gad, he was getting out of hand there).

"Oh well, if you are so meticulous, so meticulous," I repeated, "I'll go with you."

"Come, that's friendly, we'll cut along now; no need to stop, you know, just a rap on the door and 'how are you feeling,' see, get my idea?"

"Sure thing," I said (anything to get him out of that skipper's way).

"Gad, I'm a selfish brute to be thinking of nothing but fighting when that poor little thing" (I nearly

laughed aloud at this, but turned it into a neat sneeze) "is probably in a state of nervous collapse."

"Quite, quite!" from me, steering for all I was worth for the companion-way.

"Women, you know, are curious creatures; they think they are as brave as men, and so they are in a way, but they haven't our stamina, you know, not stamina exactly, it's more hardness of fiber, I think."

"Yes, yes, quite, they are really very soft little things at heart."

"That's it, their hearts are soft, they don't get all calloused up dealing with the actualities of life, as we do, old man."

"No; well, they are romantic and we are not."

"That's just it, they are, but we—"

We had reached the cabin door by this time, it was half-open, and our nervous wreck was reclining in laces and silks on her cabin sofa, smoking a cigarette, and drinking champagne as usual, therewith.

I didn't let go of my friend's arm, but waltzed him into the cabin as I gaily sang out:

"Ah, splendid! I'm glad to see you have the good sense not to give way to nerves, nothing like a little stimulant, quite the best thing,—quite right,—quite."

"Do sit down, Mr. Warburton,—and,—won't you join me, Captain Casmyth?" (There was steel there in word and eye as they passed me, to my friend).

"We have all been through a crisis tonight and a little 'stimulant' as Mr. Warburton calls it" (more steel) "will do us good. Stewardess, please ring for the steward!"

Well, the stimulant (as I called it) was brought and after a glass or two, I slipped out; no difficulty about that, I don't believe they noticed my departure.

I went straight up to the skipper on the bridge and asked him what course we were steering.

"The one agreed upon before you went ashore, S.W. by W."

I glanced at the compass card as I took a turn to starboard. Nothing wrong there. We should be in Mandevi by morning, as I knew Mrs. Casmyth desired. That was the little port near which she had made her headquarters, home if you will, if such an inveterate nomad could be said to have a home. Anyway, she had expressed a desire to call in there; dresses, I suppose, or some finery she thought would completely settle my friend's fate. Women think of their affairs in those terms.

I had to tackle this lemon-faced hound, somehow, and at once if a downright battle was to be avoided. Things had to be smoothed out somehow, before Casmyth came out of the lady's cabin. I hadn't the ghost of an idea how to start, and in such cases I always make a start and hope the idea will come with the sound of my wagging tongue. It usually does, and it did this time.

Such are the methods of the oily when taken unprepared.

"Oh, Captain," I said, "I just wanted to have a word with you if you could spare me a moment. Rather important ship's business, we don't want the quartermaster prying into our private affairs, why not come down to my cabin and have a cigar?" (That was it, get him off the bridge—a fair start, all things considered).

"Certainly, Mr. Warburton, I'll just give the Quartermaster the course for the next half-hour and then I'll join you if I am satisfied he is shaping right, but the man is not very trustworthy, I am sorry to say."

Neatly countered. I know how to wear these fellows down. "Oh, I'm in no hurry; take your time, Captain, I'll wait for you." He fussed and fiddled, and got nervous behind my stolid back, and at last gave in.

"Now, Mr. Warburton, if you will lead the way, I think I can leave this man for a little."

I led,—and straight to a prison for him, if I could not induce him to see reason in his dealings with Casmyth and myself. That idea matured as I waited on the bridge and another one followed on its heels.

When we were fairly in my cabin, I took the chair near the door, and I opened up on the skipper, full blast, forced draft, all my oil in my engines going full ahead.

"Now see here, Captain,—for Captain you are, unless those Goanese papers you have are forgeries—" (that shot took him on his second sheet of copper, well below the waterline) "—forgeries," I repeated.

"Forgeries! What do you mean," he said.

"Nothing, unless they are forgeries."

"They are not forgeries," he blustered, "what do you mean!"

"Oh, come now, between ourselves, eh? Just a little touched up, eh? Have a whiskey-and-soda, Captain—that's right—help yourself—I understand, business is business. I'm a business man myself—no use being lily-fingered in this trade, eh?"

"The ship's papers are perfectly in order."

"Yes, but what about your certificate?"

I had him, as I guessed all along; that breed has no stomach for adventure, their ancestors used all that force up long ago, and I had often wondered at his presence there at all. He got away with a forged certificate before an employer like Mrs. Casmyth, but he daren't show the thing to me. I found out afterwards just how and why he lost his own, for he had once been a first-rate man in his own class. Inveterate embezzlement of ship's stores tripped him in Bombay. I used this knowledge later to get rid of him permanently, as I shall tell when we get to that portion of

my narrative. Meantime, my intention was to put him temporarily in a corner where he would be harmless, till the moment arrived when he could be shunted completely.

I succeeded beyond my most sanguine anticipation.

I firmly demanded, as a friend of the nerve-racked lady below, his precious certificate or a full confession. At last I got the whole story out of him; the miserable tale of pilfering and final disgrace, with cries and tears. But never a whimper about his recent knavery. The fellow aspired to the hand of our hostess, and I believe he was really in love with her; he was mad with jealousy at being supplanted by Casmyth and meant to show them both he was a man to be reckoned with. What he meant to do after leaving us in the lurch I don't know; come back and hang around in the offing till we proposed terms, I suppose. He didn't quite seem certain of himself or of his future movements, and he doesn't know how nearly he succeeded.

Well, to make a long story short, I made him promise to play second fiddle to Casmyth for the rest of the trip. I made it quite clear to him that I would have that certificate business out before Casmyth, at the first sign of self-assertion (insubordination, I called it), and I wouldn't raise a finger to prevent him being flung out of the ship at the first coastal port we came to. That I knew would be the very least Casmyth would do to a fellow captaining on a forged certificate. All this seems a bit too easy, I daresay, but you must remember I had spent many years in the jute trade in a big seaport, with ships' captains as my daily companions. It is the way business runs out there. Trust no one, and see your consignments on board yourself, if you want to be sure of deliveries.

Well, having fixed up that bluff, I dismissed the Captain to the bridge, and thought I might look in

on the enamored pair. I found sufficiently interesting developments in that matter. When I knocked, the rustling I expected took place, and when I entered, I noticed powder on Casmyth's serge sleeve, and a pair of very bright eyes in our lady's lovely face.

All right, I thought, no affair of mine henceforth.

I made some commonplace remarks about having had a pleasant stroll on deck. And then got myself out again without a very pressing invitation to stay.

Where were my friend's chaperoning scruples now?

Gone, my dear readers, gone forever!

Like his senses,—though that took place some time before.

"Well," I thought, "there's nothing lost a friend gets, and I wish him luck,—he'll need it." Then I went to bed. I revised my dictum just before falling asleep, as follows: "There's nothing lost a friend gets, if he *is* getting the thing and it is not getting *him*." I suppose the mental effort of that analysis was too much for me. I slept so soundly that I never heard the steward come in with my morning tea. He was saying, "*Katch hai, Sahib*," as I opened my eyes.

## CHAPTER X

### "KASHMIR-I-KUTCH"

Sure enough, when I went on deck, there was Kutch on either bow. Dreary smears of scorpion-colored hummocks by the yellow surf of a muddy sea on Nandevi beach. I was surprised at the boldness of our skipper in standing in to such a well-known place in broad daylight, but evidently it was the usual thing with the owner. She trusted to the native secretive-ness of the Katchis and Kathiarwaris who were her neighbors. They are an independent lot of blackguards, most excellent sailors, and, like all seafaring people, skilled liars to a man. Any inquiries among them by the Custom people about our identity would merely lead to mirth-provoking prevarication, with much shameful obscenity to flavor it. Be that as it may, the skipper took his ship up those shallow waters like a street-car. After a couple of hours of half-speed, he rang over to slow and we crawled up the great Gulf of Kutch for the whole of the early morning. Dead slow we bore away up one of numerous side channels for several hours, and then a flock of white wings suddenly broke from the land, and the shipping of our port of destination hastened out to meet us, their great lateen sails making a press of canvas that seemed out of all proportion to the boats, they careened so dangerously. When they came closer we saw the reason for their speed and security. A stout plank projected ten or fifteen feet outboard to windward, the human ballast perched on the end of it clawing out to

windward over the water as the breeze threatened capsizing or creeping inboard toward the boat as the breeze eased off a little. It was a pretty sight, like a keen yacht race. As they came up to us we saw they nearly all had primitive oars like wooden salt-spoons; those who hadn't, used bits of wood and the noise of their dashing arrival was like a disturbed colony of sea-birds. They swarmed up our sides by their toe-nails. They scorn ladders and other effeminate aids for such assaults. Yet there was really no necessity for hurry, only honor for the first on deck. That is real racing.

They brought fresh dates, oranges, vegetables, mutton and innumerable kinds of silk stuffs and lacquered woodwork for sale, and soon we had a regular market on board.

They had very curious brass work, too, rough but amazingly artistic in a naïve way. Figures, frequently obscene, but excused by the frankness of their intention (obscenity is supposed to discourage evil spirits). Bartering over, they became willing carriers of anything we would send ashore. As happy and excited as buck niggers about the shifting of a piano or a big trunk. A fine hearty, merry lot of rogues. There's the material for a great Indian navy, if they could be induced to take up tin-soldiering in a ship. But they are far too independent for that. It is the combination of the recklessness of the desert and the sea that makes them so merry and independent, for their life must be bitterly precarious in those wastes of dried mud and sand and dirty water.

The place was a maze of channels and creeks and ancient ports. Occasionally traces can be found of masonry and structures of imported stones of vast dimensions. How brought there, by whom, and for what purpose, it is impossible to determine. I spent days looking for a proof of their identity; they may be

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remains of enterprises by pre-Ethiopian or Egyptian builders, for all I could discover.

It was interesting to reconstruct the place as it was when a verdant paradise, for such it must have been thousands of years ago. Its character is the same as those great tracts of land in Australia that are just beginning to raise such amazing quantities of wheat. Water is flowing underground everywhere at a depth of sixty to eighty feet, fine fresh water, probably the melted snows of Hindu Kush that once watered the rich champaign of those parts. The process of silting-up in the creeks is almost visible to the eye. The blowing sand of the great desert-formations in the hinterland has done the rest.

All fair countries should pray to be delivered from shifting sands. That may really be the meaning of the deluge. A deluge of sand that worked its way over the gardens of the world through thousands of years, slowly and effectively blotting out all that makes earth fruitful and habitable to happy communities of mankind. The Ark was probably a Caravan, poetically expressed.

We went ashore to a white palace of sun-dried brick that stood nestling in the low hills behind the little port. It was as delicious as a mirage. The white house with its innumerable domes, minarets, and deep-latticed verandas stood in a great garden, fair to see at a distance, exquisite as we approached it from the sea, but near at hand it was dusty, raffish and unkempt. The entrance to the vast walled compound round the palace was through a high deep-set archway. Over the crown was written "Kashmir-i-Kutch" in bold lettering amongst a field of delicate geometrical carving (or molded plaster-work, it was impossible to tell which because of the thick coats of lime-wash on it). We passed into the shade of the deep archway and

knocked on the great teak doors. The doors in the archway swung open as we knocked and a double line of servants salaamed to the ground as we passed into the garden.

The trees in the compound were like black charred masts below their top tufts of greenery and no verdure was near the eye in their grateful shade except the lush rank weeds along a few irrigation-channels of banked mud that flowed around the roots of the plantation. The illusion of a garden disappeared as we approached it.

I saw all these things and pondered upon them. Nevertheless, it was paradise enough for Casmyth. The house itself was bare and stark inside, practically unfurnished except for a great white-and-black ivory and ebony grand piano in the fountain court. Magnificent rugs on the walls and floors, of course. The Sukkri rugs especially were very remarkable, like pale sepia arabesques.

That harsh disorder, where order and suavity might be expected, was like the life of our hostess. All women who take easily to the roughness of a life among violent men have houses like that. Not so those violent men. I have met men steeped in crime to their gullets who had houses and gardens like Kashmiri love-nests.

Lunch was awaiting us, a typical Indian meal and typical Indian service, with no knives or forks, only primitive spoons of silver. Plenty of rice, curry, fruits, native bread and any quantity of champagne with fine brandy to lace it. Boxes of mixed spices and betel nut for each guest, at the finish.

After tiffin we all slept for several hours in the high-ceilinged cool chambers, like temples (you couldn't call them bedrooms despite the divans).

The whole place was shut up till near sundown, and all life sank into cessation in the drowsy heat

that seemed to break against the house in throbbing waves as it flowed in from the desert around us.

I got into a silk pajama suit that was laid out for me and tried to read some French novels I found near my bedside. Those dreary banalities of dusty lust always lay me out. I slept till the evening breeze awoke me by rustling the palms in the garden.

When I went outside I was astonished to find our hostess and my friend busily sketching in the veranda of the great reception-hall.

I could understand my friend's industry, his artistic temperament drove him like that sometimes. But please try to understand the self-immolation of an Indian lady who will stay awake with an artist at such a time of day to inspire his work. In the desert, too! Impossible! You can't. Her whole soul must have been craving for the afternoon sleep of her ancestral habits.

"By gad!" I thought, "this is a serious business, after all! It's worse than I guessed. He will end by marrying her!" He did, as you know already. I have to make the force of their mutual devotion clear by such incidents and indications as that sketching business. They did love each other deeply and sincerely and in other circumstances their marriage might have been a heaven-sent thing. They were not *quite* blind to each other's faults, and they both had plenty; they were too sophisticated for that. I don't know that I didn't envy them their very faults, they had so much love for each other, to set off against such things. The perfectly acquiescent Eastern woman, without the acquired comradeship, would never have captured and enslaved the imagination of my friend. His native gallantry was touched by the faults he would have condoned so easily in a gallant and intrepid comrade of the sea. That lady took him on that side, boarded and sank him, riddled him with the hot fire of her love.

And I envied him.

To confess a secret I have been so transparently disingenuous about, I had cherished a hope, a little shy, half-witted one—in that direction, myself.

Well, there's nothing lost a friend gets.

They did not see me, although I had not come upon them with any care or softly. They only saw each other.

They were magnificent.

They made that garden seem full of joyous and fragrant significances.

I did steal away softly, carefully—to commune with my thoughts. After walking sadly about for some time I determined to go to find the source of the water-channels. As I came upon the pool that fed the channels, a bulbul was in the garden, singing its immortal trills; I stopped by the pool in this quiet part of the garden to listen to those fine-drawn notes, so like a nightingale and so unlike. The evening breeze had almost died out and the tremulous half-light of the garden was neither sun nor moon; the beginning and the end of each, it seemed to seep through the purple twilight that held everything in suspension between earth and sky. As I listened to the bulbul by the pool the waxing moon peered through the trees, making molten gouts of gold on the water of the deep pool, and Viroschand stood in the midst thereof!

How deeply corrosive is a shame that has long been ignored! That vision of Viroschand bit into my vitals like potent acid on bared metal. Contrition and remorse came upon me. How much further would reckless adventuring take me along the road to spiritual destruction? I felt the horrid clammy fear that comes to a hard drinker in the first knowledge that “drunkard” is his real name. I had neglected in my selfishness even to inform Viroschand that his ship was

a charred wreck in the bottom of the Persian Gulf! How long I looked on that shape which was the embodiment of my own repressed conscience, I do not know. The mood of sad reflection that makes such experiences possible is not my natural habit of mind and even without an accident of disturbance shaking me from my reverie I could not then have retained my impression of Viroschand's presence in any sustained degree. That mood did not last long, I was not ripe for destruction, or—or saving reflection. I could still call sober reflection "mood," you note, moodiness.

I shall not describe that vision by the pool. It was little more than a presence apprehended, but despite my irritable recognition I was shaken by the realization of my persistent indifference to the claims of my benefactor.

I was whipped back into the moonlit garden by the crash of a vulture falling into the trees overhead. Too crammed with carrion to fly further, it came hurtling through the boskage and disgorged loathsomely at my feet.

It may be that was part of the message to be read in conjunction with Viroschand's presence. (Who can distinguish between accidental and controlled sequence in India?)

A portrait of myself for contemplation? Should I cram myself with carrion and disgorge at the last!

I fled from it all.

I had begun to fly from myself, you will gather, habitually.

If the sinister portent of the vulture was meant for me, it failed in achievement. It savored too much of comic relief, of repulsion, for that. "What right," I argued with myself, "had Viroschand to dictate to me in my own affairs? Affairs that had been undertaken largely to enable us to reimburse him for losses

he was as much involved in as we were. Surely, he could understand that we meant to further his interests as well as our own. I would cable next day to Calcutta exact news of the fate of the *Shah Jehan*, with hopeful but discreetly veiled hints of a successful issue of our new adventure. Yes, I had the cable and letter in my pocket and I would touch them up and get them off. I would pay for the schooner twice over, later. Explanation in detail is for the underlings in life."

I never sent that cable! Nor the letter, as you know.

Under the stimulus of irritation, I argued myself back into the necessary state of self-justification. That's what I mean when I say that vulture was overdone if Viroschand had anything to do with the "sending" of it. I was as firmly rooted shortly after as I was before the vision in my intention to avoid all reflection. No Indian could have indulged in such hardihood of conscience in the face of a seemingly direct interposition of Providence. The disaster that soon followed that vision would have pleased an Indian, illustrating the whole dangerous scheme of human culpability in regard to disorderly activities. Vishnu must be consulted first, that Siva may not destroy!

Success might have crowned our adventures, of course, for there is always a chance, Westerners think, in the most desperate cases; that is where we differ from the Indians. We battle with the gods and frequently prevail; they don't.

We don't know that we do such things.

We call it something less high-flown.

The Indians call it by much more flowery names.

But they don't do it.

What is it really, this Western difference?

I think that Westerners are only practically philosophical and Indians only philosophically practical;

they interminably perfect their philosophy, happily tracing fine coil within fine coil of involution—and forget in their fine fervor all application of their investigations to practical life. They penetrate to the hair-spring of our being and know the main-spring of all human actions, and prophesy the fates of others, their own fates left untouched.

They explore, and examine, and classify, in realms of the spirit—most happy if the needs of the body containing it are completely forgotten and ignored.

From suffering and disaster amongst material things, it is here they take shelter,—it is no wonder they seem to fail in a crisis of practical matters.

Viroschand, I believe, slipped back unconsciously into the misty borderland, for consolation in his time of trial, projecting his spirit to his friends when other communion was denied him.

Those were the disjointed ideas moving through my head as I strode toward the palace. I would battle with prophecy and it should fail. I became my own man again. Viroschand would come to admire, where he had disapproved. Indian fineness would get a lesson from hard, practical Westernism.

I found those lovers still sketching,—their future bliss, by the light of each other's eyes. It was too dark for anything else.

I had been overlooked quite long enough.

So I jabbed them both viciously.

Casmyth plunged like a blooded horse under a gadfly when I briefly reminded him of our omissions in regard to Viroschand, and the lady got a pretty pinking when I asked her if she had recent news of her brother in Calcutta. She was furious with me!

They would both have bowstringed me with pleasure. What a boor! what indelicacy at such a moment!

Heap I cared! Why should I be the only one to suffer while they had dalliance in paradise?

I didn't mention the pool, though, or the vulture. Casmyth would have understood and refrained from mentioning liver pills; he has been too long in the East himself for such easy skepticism. The lady was the one exception to the Indian character that I have ever met who cared nought for such things. She only cared for her own way, over corpses, and past devils if necessary.

But frankly, putting all occultism and mysticism aside and regarding the matter as curious hazard or pure accident, with that old letter and cable to Viroshand in my pocket, I felt the visitation had a very apposite and personal quality, for it was by my advice that the letter and cable were not sent off by camel to Maskat, immediately they were written. I wanted a properly authorized camel escort for that correspondence. But, as you know, we never got it.

"Have you got that letter and cable we wrote?" asked Casmyth.

"I have."

"Well, then, let us send them both off tonight and may I suggest a slight amendment of cable and letter?"

"By all means."

"I suggest that we refrain from asking for more financial assistance. There is little doubt that we shall be able to reimburse Viroschand quite adequately. Why worry him about details?"

(My ideas, in brief, you see.)

"Precisely," said the lady, "we have done very well so far, and there is no reason why we should not do infinitely better. It hardly seems necessary for me to write at all, I think. We are not slaves forever rendering accounts."

(Another of my ideas; curious, isn't it?)

I didn't know she hadn't written her brother for years; they had in fact quarreled bitterly over her way of life.

So she had her way, as usual.

All smiles, now that the dislocation of her little scheme seemed shelved indefinitely! Casmyth found her mellow mood intoxicating, of course.

Why should I be the everlasting boor?

So we went in to dinner, gaily redetermined.

After the meal, Casmyth played some comic things on the great ivory and ebony piano in a recess of the fountain court. Some of the keys were stuck and as Casmyth played, it gave an extraordinary effect of ragtime—illusion—syncopation! what is it! He was most amusing when he chose. I remember particularly his favorite ditty:

“Many a night I’ve spent with many a mermaid,  
Down at the bottom of the sea—  
Ashes to ashes and dust to dust,  
If the sharks don’t get you the mermaids must.”

How strange it sounded as a syncopated melody! Our lady started to play, after Casmyth was tired of his fooling, but became so angry at the occasional keys that stuck, she flung away in a rage. She could not be funny, no Indians can—Heaven help them!

She summoned the butler and it looked like very stormy weather for him. It seems she had ordered attention to the keys some time ago. But it is one thing to order and another thing to get a piano fixed, in those parts of the world.

The butler knew his mistress. He said he had arranged an orchestra of musicians for our entertainment as soon as we were sighted in the port. Happy chance, I believe, served him, as it usually does such bold liars.

The band was summoned. They came in with great bowls of water, which were placed in a semicircle before us. Our old friend the musical glasses, I thought,—that butler will catch it if there is any funny business. But I was mistaken. It seems that the best Indian music is so fine and delicate in its distinction of notes, it is frequently played over water to enhance these subtle distinctions. I have been assured that a Western ear would not appreciate certain combinations of notes at all, without such aids.

The music was wonderful. But you have to be in a mysteriously lit fountain-court on the edge of the desert to feel the full grip of it. We could see the garden in the moonlight at the far end of the court, through the delicate arcade. The dust and brickbats were all transformed from their ignoble actuality by the Indian moon, the stark tree trunks had the sensuous sheen of a slender leg in a black silk stocking, the foliage was ebony tracing on the deep-toned lapis lazuli of the night; the distant sea said hush! slowly—and hush! again, ceaselessly calling all things to attend entirely upon the mystery of the night.

Those two lovers had got together somehow, though I swear they were yards apart when the music started.

Truly! this was Kashmir-i-Kutch for them!

When the band was dismissed I proposed a walk in the garden, now quite cool.

I went alone and had a pleasant stroll, preceded by a lantern-bearer, and followed by a khansamah with an old sword tied on the end of a bamboo pole. He evidently had a personal method with snakes. I never observed that before or since.

I walked out along the road for a mile or two and saw the *Ranee* at anchor in the port, with all proper lights burning.

The skipper was now under the eye of our serang

and Rahzan, by our instructions. He would be a smart fellow to get anything past those two watch-dogs. I determined to have the fellow's proper position fixed in the morning. Satisfied, I returned to the palace and went to bed. It was long enough after the monsoon to be cool at night and I slept excellently well. In the morning at breakfast I took up the question of the fate of our skipper. I need not have troubled. My friends had settled it all the previous night; had spent many hours thrashing it all out. I can imagine the pleasure they had in it, hand in hand.

The skipper was to have another chance, but he was to be kept under watch always; the serang to be assistant quartermaster henceforth for that purpose, and Rahzan deputy ditto, relieving each other by watches but of course taking no turn at the wheel while on the bridge. I was content with that arrangement. They had a third deputy Q.M. in me, but they didn't know, nor did I think fit then to tell them of the power I had gained over Captain Lemon-Peel. I should have saved a lot of trouble if I had, as it turned out.

Well, we spent nearly a week very happily, taking in water, oil, stores, etc. The last evening we finally settled upon our future trade route: Dwazka, Devibunder, Diu (the Kathiawar town) and the Gulf of Cambay.

A big field of operations, but unpleasantly close to Bombay at the finish. We should have to be very careful there. It was very difficult to decide whether we should cross over to the Gujerati side straight away, once we left Devibunder (on the Kathiawar side), giving Bombay a wide berth all the time, or come down that side at the last, trusting to our speed and lightness as regards oil and water to slip out of any trouble.

There was nothing much for us on the Kathiawar

side, once past Devibunder. Our principle objective was Baroda at the head of those waters, where things are free and easy. Also there were a few nice plums between that and Bombay, on the Gujerati side. We missed all those, as you shall hear.

Eventually we decided on the latter course and it is just as well we did, for that damned skipper ran out our oil tanks when we were half-way from Cambay. If it had happened nearer the Bombay side!—but it didn't, so let's get on.

I left Kashmir-i-Kutch with a strange foreboding of evil. I had grown accustomed to the untidy garden, and moreover the owner, seeing for a brief period through Casmyth's eyes (and perhaps in some small degree through mine), had set a horde of sweepers and malis (gardeners) to work and they performed wonders in the few days we were there. It had become the site at least, for a lovely garden, but it was too vast to reform under months of labor. The assorted snakes they turned out would fill a book on reptology (if there is such a thing). They were never killed unless I was about. One old mali made me furious. There was a great cobra coiled in the middle of one of the paths they were clearing, one morning as I took a stroll before breakfast. I ordered him to destroy the beast at once with his mattock. The mali merely turned back to his work, informing me that Sir Cobra had dwelt in the garden long before I arrived. I don't think he meant to be uncivil; they are very independent people and free in speech at all times. The cobra slipped quietly into the dry brakes and bushes, and I knew better than to follow without a shotgun.

We got into trouble soon after our departure from the port, grounding on a perfectly obvious sandbank while we were at tiffin below.

Casmyth rushed up on deck and swore he would never leave the skipper in charge alone again.'

I don't know to this day whether we grounded by accident or not. He certainly brought us past the same danger, coming up the channel. Perhaps he was nervous, exasperated at the continual presence of his new quartermasters, for both seemed anxious to do double duty all day and all night. But the owner's orders were explicit and he had to put up with their dogging his footsteps continually. It was a long, tedious business, getting off that sandbank, but we were going dead slow at the time and had not run on hard. The whole port turned out to help us, so we got under way again in less than three hours.

Casmyth conned the ship out and we were at sea again before nightfall.

## CHAPTER XI

### TRADING OPIUM FOR RUBIES

Our arrival at Dwazka in the small hours of the morning was opportune.

The place is too big and too open to stay long on such business as ours. It had to be tip and run or leave the place severely alone.

There is a large industrial population engaged by the cement works, with many English and Americans in executive positions at the works. The native workers, of course, could pay handsomely for our wares, in good rupees, too, and our agents were ready to receive a big consignment.

We had arranged all that before leaving Kutch, by sending Rahzan in the steam-launch to Dwazka. I knew the shore end of the place quite well, and if all went smoothly the whole affair should not occupy more than a couple of hours at the outside. It was simply a question of landing, at a quiet spot along the shore, discharging our cargo from the felucca (now a dhow or country wallah, with a single mast, since her recent transformation), and a race back to the *Ranee* and away in the night.

We were getting short of ready money, I gathered from Casmyth, who was now in possession of every detail of our organization. We had to make a success in Dwazka. Yet Casmyth would not trust the *Ranee* to the skipper alone. He would not trust our hostess to deal with him either, and I suspect there were other private and passionate reasons for his

determination to stick to the ship end of the affair. Anyway, he meant to do just that and drilled me in every detail of the landing party, all the way from Kutch.

Briefly, the run was very successful, the biggest we had pulled off so far. I should not like to say exactly what the amounts were that changed hands. It surprised even myself, and I had come to look on business in terms of lakhs (100,000 rupees).

There was one shock awaiting me ashore, and but for Rahzan we should have been made a pack of fools. Some of the agents had the effrontery to try us with forged notes, skilful native forgeries, in the big notes. They had reckoned on our desperate hurry to get away, and knew we would never be able to trace the culprits if we returned later for revenge.

Half the consignment was on shore when Rahzan plunged overboard and raced along the beach. There was a scuffle near the water's edge and I heard him shouting, *Badmashi! né pukkero!* (blackguard, drop that). I dared not leave the felucca; I expected shots every minute, or knife work. But it all quieted down. Rahzan, single-handed, quelled that mob by the water's edge and demanded a recount of all the opium boxes. When he was satisfied, he sent a messenger to me to ask for the return of all the money that had passed. I promptly flung off the gangplank and pulled a gun on my guests, threatening to shoot the first man who moved.

Casmyth had put the gun in my hand as I left the *Ranee* and I had laughed at the idea of myself as a leader in such deeds of desperation.

Behind a shaded light I counted all the money I had received and got a receipt for it from the chief agent. I then sent the messenger back to Rahzan with the receipt and an explanation of it. He then came

on board with practically all the opium that had left the felucca.

Then there were bitter words between Rahzan and the agents. The chief merchant was a wizened little Mohammedan Hadji, with a weedy red beard. He offered to guarantee all money that passed henceforth, with his own *hoondies* (notes of hand).

I refused the offer, of course.

*Hoondies* are hard enough to collect in legitimate way of trade; impossible in ours, practically.

We were at a deadlock.

Then Rahzan, the ever-resourceful, came forward with the suggestion that the merchant produce rubies. The old Hadji was furious. How did Rahzan know he was in possession of such stones? (Rahzan's nose for stones was like the hazel rod of a water diviner; he could smell stones!) He had found out all about the great quantity of stones in the place on his recent visit, of course.

Well, after a lot of gabble, the Hadji was talked into the deal. So many *hoondies*, so many of his rubies. And then the rubies were sent for.

It was a horrid long wait. I knew Casmyth would be dancing about with impatience. He was rather good at that kind of dancing, you know.

There was not more than half an hour to daybreak when the rubies came at last. Then Rahzan must examine every stone individually. He threw out a lot but there remained enough to pay for most of the consignment we had with us.

I had a brief talk with the old Hadji and arranged to meet him in Devibunder two nights later and hand back his rubies and *hoondies* for specie, if he cared to come in person to a rendezvous I named. Dangerous work, but we had to have money somehow. There is more treachery worked in India and more violent

deaths incurred by the simple rendezvous trick than by any other form of villainy.

Not that I intended any trickery then, though I did later, for a reason.

Every day you read of such crimes occurring, frequently amusing to a degree, consisting of the simplest plot, with the astutest scoundrels in the world as victims. The more astute the victim, the simpler the plot. I knew all this, and I reflected somewhat bitterly that I might very well be the principal actor in the next sordid throat-slitting scene in that setting. I laughed a little, too, wondering just what form of harlequinade would cover the sudden final stabbing, slashing scuffle. The most usual "props" in the piece are: a retired jeweler with stolen plate or stones for disposal, a wealthy Hindoo money-lender (any wealthy, slightly nefarious person will do), a sham policeman (disguised henchman of the retired jeweler, usually a Moham-medan), quiet suburban rendezvous, exchange of commodities and cash nearly completed, sudden arrival of mock policeman, arrest of money-lender and jeweler with confiscation of money-bag, sudden bolt of latter chased by the policeman holding the bag, and of course the fat money-lender a bad third, easily left behind in the dark. If the money-lender happens to be suspicious too early in the comedy, he merely gets a knife across his throat and the result is the same, with all the comedy running out with the blood pumping from his jugular veins.

There are dozens of variations on the theme, and I wondered which might be tried on me. I should have to play the part of the slightly nefarious victim at Devibunder and it stuck in my gullet more than a little. However, I had been in worse situations in business in India and defeated my opponent.

As the matter turned out, I got all the money quite

without serious accident, by vamping up a variation of the mock policeman stunt myself.

It sometimes happens that the wealthy money-lender has some spirit and a strain of good-will or Mahratti stock in him. Then he arranges to have his own mock policeman arrive suddenly and arrest the first one. This nearly always leads to violence and perhaps murder, for you can see for yourself it works out into a Hindoo-Mohammedan riot on a small scale, and nothing but blood can stop that sort of thing.

It was nearly daylight when we reached the *Ranee* and got under way. She had a full head of steam and was moving through the water when I came alongside. Casmyth met me at the foot of the gangway, and hustled the felucca crew out at the double, mustering them on deck. I wondered at this and said, "Why all this dress parade?"

"I was afraid of deserters, nearly all our crew come from these parts."

"Well, they could have slipped off at Kutch, couldn't they?"

"They could, but they don't; the Kutchis hate them as the Ghibelines the Guelphs; if they stayed ashore at Kutch, they would probably be knifed before they got a mile on the road to Dwazka."

"I knew they were amiable neighbors, but I did not know they were quite as bad as that."

"Evidently not, by the time and chances you took ashore there."

He was testy, at his interrupted love-making, I suppose.

"Now look here, Casmyth," I said, "I've had the devil's own time ashore there, and I don't feel like taking much criticism about it."

"What do you mean? You took four hours over a

two-hour job. The lady is in a fine state of nerves, I can tell you."

"Nerves! Her nerves leave me stone-cold."

Casmyth's face went stringy with passion. I regretted my speech too late. I had forgotten the proverbial blindness of lovers to each other's affectations.

"When I have dismissed the crew, perhaps you will be kind enough to come into the saloon for a moment," he said. There was a little too much of the captain and the subordinate in that form of address for me, so I curtly said, "I will come when I am ready," and turned on my heel and went to my cabin.

He could cool his heels and his temper till I was ready.

In my cabin I warmed up to my grievances; while they were dallying safely on board I was sweating in that surf, expecting every minute to carry away our anchors or get knifed in a brawl, or worse, from the Customs people. I got my speech all hot and ready, I can tell you, and peppered it liberally. In the middle of my elocutionary preparations, a gentle knock sounded on my cabin door. It was the lady herself, with a steward and glasses; she knew how to treat a ruffled man. She must have heard our little sparring match on deck, or some of it and meant to have no squabbling between her lieutenants.

Well, she talked me nearly round, of course, and the sandwiches and wine did the rest.

I went in search of Casmyth myself. I found him on the bridge, talking soundings with our skipper. He was pretty stiff with me at first, but by dint of quite intelligent questions about his precious soundings, I got the rasp out of his voice and then suggested a drink down below with our hostess. He agreed.

"I'll come when we are out of soundings. I'm whack-

ing the old girl along now at twelve knots due West, so we ought to be fairly safe then."

"Good enough," I said. "I'll go and order the wine on ice."

When I went down to the saloon Mrs. Casmyth (you understand of course this is anticipating her nuptials a little) was running the rubies through her fingers. She looked a little at me and then, quizzically, back to the stones.

"I'm sorry," I said, "that's the best I could do."

"Well, we can't eat rubies, nor run engines with them."

Then I told her about the rendezvous at Devibunder in two nights' time.

She laughed till the tears ran down her delicately powdered cheeks.

"You surely don't expect to see that Hadji again?"

"I most certainly do."

"Well, I hope you will, you precious infant."

She wasn't angry, much too mellow for that.

I was a little nettled. As a business man, I had sized that old Hadji up, and decided to take a risk with him (I mean, I would risk pitting my intelligence against his trickery. For I knew he would try to trick me). In business you get nowhere without sufficient acumen to decide between legitimate risk and hopeless risk. Not in India, anyway, where trickery is an accepted factor in business. You either have to decline bluntly any negotiations or be prepared to counter trickery with skill. I then told our lady of the proposed variation on the mock-policeman stunt I proposed to work off on the Hadji, only the rough idea, of course. We worked it out later in detail. I knew Casmyth would need all the handling I could give him when he knew I hadn't brought money from the one place on the coast where we thought we could get it safely. We

had a drink together and laughed 'again about my proposed *custodiet ipsos custodes* variation of the rendezvous drama.

When Casmyth came down at last, we pushed the box of stones across the table to him without a word. He looked at them casually, saying,

"Very pretty, where did they come from?"

"Mr. Warburton found them, at Dwazka."

"Found them! Do you mean he didn't get the money?"

"He didn't," I cut in, "but wait, we're to get all the money we need in forty-eight hours," and then I explained the whole situation. He saw the joke about my policeman, fortunately, and laughed as heartily as we had done. Once get an Irishman laughing, the black blood moves around in his veins, and you have nearly an amiable companion. A little wine will do the rest.

The wine steward came in then and we set to work upon the details of our comedy.

"It will have to be a Customs official in this case," Casmyth said.

"Of course, but the point is, who is to take the part?"

"Hang me, if I won't meself." (Irish accent and all, our troubles were over!)

"Let me send for the dhursi" (tailor), said Mrs. Casmyth, "and he shall measure you for the costume at once."

"We shall want a Customs crew, as well," I said.

"Leave all that to me; if I am to be a Customs officer, I'll produce a Customs crew."

"Complete, with petty officer?"

"Why not? Lemon-Face will do that if I say so."

"Too risky."

"Well, then, who?"

"We will have to do without, the chief engineer is

much too foreign-looking" (he was a half-caste Chinese-Negro) "and much too staid and respectable."

"I will be the petty officer," said Mrs. Casmyth.

We roared with laughter, and then—

"Why not?" said Casmyth.

"Why not, indeed," said I. "Strange that I did not think of it before."

So we set to work on the details of the fiduciary comedy. We had a dress rehearsal, with makeshift costumes, on the spot. A merry affair, and we all drank too much wine, I'm afraid, before the lines and parts were settled for the book.

"There's one point we have not settled—who is to look after the *Ranee* while we are play-acting on shore?"

Gloom!

That skipper had tripped us up again.

We knew the chief engineer would refuse.

He might be induced to take a part (secondary, silent, back-stage) in the play, but he would not play at Captaining. He took ship duties far too seriously.

Deep gloom on the whole party!

"But look here," said Casmyth, "haven't we gone a bit too far ahead of the facts? What proof have we that any knavery will arise that needs all these precautions? We have the rubies, after all."

"If they would palm off bad notes on me by the thousand they would stick at nothing."

"But are you sure that the old Hadji was in it?"

"I'm not, at least, not tonight, but it's a dead cert he will be forty-eight hours hence. It's a psychological certainty, or I know nothing of natives."

"You're right, he couldn't resist it."

Well, there we were back at the beginning again; the play had to come off. It did, and that farce belongs to my next chapter. It was a prelude to the biggest haul

we ever made. We got our money for the rubies, and a lot more for the new consignment, with fine pearls (easily disposed of, these) to boot. A regular fortune for two nights' work!

It was Mrs. Casmyth's bright brain that produced the necessary *deus ex machina* that turned the whole trick, and helped us to stay by the ship and fool that wily old Hadji. Rahzan was brought down from his beloved vigil on deck, and stood in the doorway of the saloon to hear his part in the scheme. That old man's eyes twinkled with mirth at the jest. It was the plot within a plot, barbed kernel and soft shell, that made him as happy as a pound of opium. He went off with half a bottle of champagne inside him snapping his knuckles with glee and chuckling like a brook.

I am itching to tell you the subtle scheme that filled our coffers, but it would only spoil the fine Eastern flavor of the joke. You must wait a little.

My American readers won't mind waiting a little; they love a story skilfully related; their humor is as accurately timed as a fuse on a shell. Other readers must peep ahead and defraud themselves of an exquisite oddity, as exotic as the mixture of oysters and olives; let them, they will only get less than they paid for by such childish impatience.

Before we all went to bed, we had one more dress rehearsal with a dummy Rahzan, for of course we could not invite him into the saloon; he would have refused if we had. Indians of the right sort, no matter how low their caste, will put you in your proper place if you ask them to step out of theirs.

I remember a curious and amusing incident that made me vow never to forget what was due to traditional ceremony and accepted order in India. It happened up in the hills; a friend and I were coming back from an unsuccessful tiger shoot. Two tigers, both

missed, and a long night in a *machan*, devoured by mosquitoes, all the time in perfect immobility, is a weary experience. We were exhausted and irritable. We had edged our way along a very narrow ledge on the face of a *ghaut*, with a drop of two hundred and fifty feet below. A nasty place at best. We were walking ahead, guns and servants behind, when a man on a small donkey came round some boulders (the donkeys there are about as big as large sheep) and was within a few yards of us before we noticed him; we stopped and he stopped, and solemnly got off his donkey and removed his shoes; all in perfect order, but the trouble began there. If he got on his donkey we might be able to squeeze past him; off it, he blocked up the whole gangway. Irritably, we sent a servant to tell the man to get on his donkey and let us get past; he refused. We stormed! And what do you think he did? Picked up his donkey and held it round his shoulders till we got past! And not on the wall side either!

He could have turned his donkey and walked ahead of us, shoeless, nearly a mile over a road covered with sharp flints, but that is not the point. Before Sahibs, Indian or Western, of the right order, the proper thing to do is to dismount and let the Sahibs pass; very well, then, a method of letting Sahibs pass must be found, that is all.

He found it; that all might be in order.

Have I digressed too far? Let me get back to my *Avatar in Vishnu Land* but without unseemly haste, for it is my intention at once to make clear the meaning of an avatar, in Vishnu Land, where Vishnu is supreme, controlling all phenomena, human or otherwise, who, properly revered, can transmute all substance into mutable spirit, taking on any visible significance that will serve the need of all humble admirers of an ordered life. Irreverence to such a power may make me

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a maggot for a thousand lives, slowly sinking through those lives to a nit on a maggot's back if I persist in the wicked perversity of disorder.

But worshipping in sincerity and self-abasement, acknowledging the Ordered All, I may become a sun-beam, or an ether-wave devoid of all self and personality and gross material desire, and through a thousand such refinements of individuality become sensitive enough to merge imperceptibly into the great Nirvana, whence come and return all things ordered.

All is ordered, all is arranged, Vishnu preserveth all things, and preserveth order among them. All sacrifice of self is called for, the uttermost negation of external needs is inherently laudable, and beyond self-sacrifice, the sacrifice of another binding avatar, meet to disorder, may also be desirable.

Viroschand achieved this last sacrifice when his avatar and ours was imperiled by earthly desires. Greater love even than laying down life for a friend may be the sacrifice of his love by a friend who sacrifices us to a saving catastrophe. Such was the end of Viroschand's earthly avatar. Such was the beginning of order in mine, where only great disorder had prevailed. Does this seem far fetched? It does in New York, I agree.

Resolutely disorderly Westerners should try to believe that the mysteries of science and art which they wrest from nature so violently and with such toil were, in essential principles, all discovered in India long, long ago, by an orderly progression to those peaks of human effort.

But not exploited in India, mark that!

What are radio messages but vibrations in orderly progression along the ether? What is thought but orderly vibrations of matter? What is matter but orderly vibrations of particles? What is anything? Only order in that thing, otherwise,—nothing.

Perhaps those visions I have spoken of were only thought transference, a rare Eastern form of radio phenomena.

Beyond things—nothing.

Nirvana?

So all things progress toward their proper end, but disorder may enter, and Siva the destroyer awaits for all things that Vishnu cannot preserve in order.

Contemplate with me the disorder I had already achieved in the ordering of my own life.

Still further along that path of violent disorder did I proceed, ever more swiftly and violently, till Vishnu put forth all his powers in my behalf, and that of my companions.

Did he give me a sense of order at the last?

Read on and you shall see.

## CHAPTER XII

### WE OUTWIT A HADJI

Now I must take you to the theater of operations for that promised mixture of Grand Guignol and Opera Bouffe.

We made a big sweep in the night, from Dwazka, S.W. by S., laying on a return course straight back to Devibunder, E. by N. There was no actual necessity of navigation for such a devious course, but we had our reasons. Chiefly to throw Customs craft off our track—we were getting dangerously near Bombay and civilization, you must realize—and also to avoid continual use of our Kelvin sounder. You know the kind of contraption, of course; long tube full of patent fluid, that changes color in its length proportionately with the depth of the water it is plunged in. We had only a limited supply of these tubes, and there is no safety in navigating that coast without them. The rapidity of the silting-up along that coast is incredible to those who have no personal knowledge of the actual conditions in the Gulf. Basra at the head of the Gulf used to be a seaport; it is in historical records as such. Now Basra is over forty miles from the sea.

As things turned out, we made a slight mistake on the return leg, standing in for Devibunder, that is—(the lights on that coast are a scandal)—and we had to use a lot of the precious tubes working our way along the estuary on which the port is situated. To make matters worse we had to go half-speed so long that it

was nearly dawn before we got our anchor down. Now Devibunder is too good to miss, having a big trade in fine white building-stone, the only fine oolite I know in the north of India, where most of the geological formations available are immemorial igneous rock—trap,—blue or yellow. So the port was a thriving place with lots of ready money. We meant to scoop the pool. But it was as dangerous to us as Dwazka; caution was imperative. Moreover, there was the “Fiduciary” comedy to stage. Anything to avoid bungling that, so we hauled our anchor, after a brief consultation in the gray dawn, and stood off to sea again.

Our shortage of Kelvin sounders let that lemon-peel-faced Goanese in again, as I will tell in its proper place.

We spent the rest of the day at sea in perfecting the whole ship’s company in their parts for the coming play. Indians are not easily interested in Western jokes, they don’t see them, or they pretend they don’t, as I have said before; but our amateur dramatic society saw the joke we had in hand then. It was practical, and that is the only practical thing Indians do like. But then it was an old Indian play, furbished up a little, and that alone makes a strong appeal to such people.

About midnight we were back at our anchorage of the early morning, with the dramatic society, in full fig, mustered aft near the saloon. We waited upon Mrs. Casmyth. She was perfect when she came at last, as a smart petty officer of Customs. Casmyth had shaved off his beard; he had simply been waiting for an opportunity to do that ever since he met the lady who became his wife. Of course he looked the part of Customs officer to the life and the last button. As you know, I had to be myself, *ignobile vulgus*, in that star turn: “The Comic Customs Crew.”

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We were a little late waiting to see Mrs. Casmyth's costume, so I had to hustle off on the felucca (vice dhow) with a skeleton crew, just enough to row; we had no contraband on board, so we did not fear being apprehended, and we had no rubies on board either—now I've let the cat out of the bag too soon! no matter, we will open the play, although you think you have read the plot on the program, so here goes:

### THE COMIC CUSTOMS CREW

A ROARING FARCE IN THREE SCENES

as played by

THE ARABIAN OCEAN OPERA<sup>ING</sup> CO<sup>V</sup>

#### SCENE I

*The entrance to an Eastern port at night. A raffish dhow, wafted by a light breeze off the sea, approaches the sleeping port in the dead of night; the lonely figure of a European stands by the helmsman. A close inspection would reveal that the progress of the strange craft is assisted by a small number of sweeps or oars, manned below the main deck.*

*A small native craft is seen like a black log on the water, near the end of the pier of the port.*

L. E. (*lonely European, myself, to helmsman*). "Asti! Rahzan,—I think I hear and see our friends, go forward and do thou as I have instructed thee in the matter of the signals, striking three matches in the proper order. I will take the helm." (*Helmsman goes forward.*) "Asti jao below!" ("Slowly, rowers.")

RAHZAN (*striking three matches, and seeing an answering three in the small native craft*). "Sahib! Hadji hi! bas" ("Stop")!

VOICE FROM NATIVE CRAFT (*softly*). "Ker hi!"

L. E. (*in stage hiss*). "Dwarka Sahib hi!"

VOICE. "Thik! we come on board, throw a rope down, O Sahib! that we may ascend."

RAHZAN. "Softly, softly, the Sahib would fain inquire of thee if in very truth thou hast those monies with thee, as agreed upon heretofore."

VOICE (*in small boat, alongside now*). "By my beard, thou coolie!" (*deadly insult to a desert man*)—"By what authority dost thou inquire concerning monies that are thy master's concern?"

RAHZAN. "Ha! Ha! then thou hast not those monies, 'tis as I thought, and as my Sahib feared! All Mohammedans are liars!"

ANGRY VOICE. "Old carrion crow! Throw a rope that I may ascend and slit thy nose. Oh! Sahib, how long sufferest thou the insolence of thy servant! Is this the way to welcome old friends in commerce?"

SAHIB (*or L. E.*), *like Brer Fox, sez nuffin*'.

RAHZAN (*to natives below*). "My old eyes are dim, alas! yet in the shadow of the pier it seemeth there be shapes like unto a congregation of boats even such as thine, doubtless poor fishermen's boats, who are all asleep on shore, with their wives, as honest men do sleep. We be fearful folk, we Sahibs" (*a crack at me*)—"timorous, doubting, we would fain be assured that ye are as ye seem."

(*It was quite true, you know, old Rahzan had eyes like a hawk; there was the Mohammedans' mock "policeman," in force though, in the shadow of the pier!*)

VOICE (*still more angry*). "Purblind old fool! What moon-madness has taken possession of thee? And on a moonless night! What boats dost thou rave about? Here are no boats but ours below thee!"

RAHZAN. "Ah, gracious merchant, thou speakest comforting words to a timorous old man. I am fully as-

sured. Look! see! a rope descends above thee, and with a fair noose,—plucking thee out of Eblis, as Mahomet doth his repentant ones, as thy religion expoundeth!” (*Sure enough, a noose, carefully arranged beforehand, plucked the old Hadji out of his boat, with all hands on the dhow laying aft below on a running tackle to our boom, high up the mast, all at a sign from Rahzan.*)

*To the intense surprise and indignation of the Hadji, our dhow set off to sea at a good speed, followed by the furious natives in the little boat below, hanging on by a boat-hook.)*

## SCENE II

### *The Deck of the Dhow*

RAHZAN. “Ha! Ha! who is now the carrion crow, old dangler in a noose, that should be round thy neck instead of thy old body! In truth, thou art very much like those crows hung in the trees in my father’s garden, as a warning to other pickers of plums by stealth. Flap thy wings, old crow” (*Mohammedans of the Hadji’s age affect long dark flowing frock coats*)—“Flap, I say! Art out of the evil company of those sons of Eblis in the boat below? Mayhap thou shalt flap thy way to Paradise!”

HADJI. “Pig! Pig! Pig of a pig-eater! Unbeliever!” etc., etc., etc.

MYSELF (*approaching the Hadji and lowering him on deck*). “So, Hadji, thou wouldst trick a Sahib, wherefor? After swearing faith on thy beard?”

HADJI. “What trick, Sahib?”

MYSELF (*twisting the old fellow round quickly aft and pointing astern*). “That trick! Thou had’st a half-score of boats ready to filch rubies and money together!”

HADJI. "By my beard, I know nothing of those boats."

MYSELF. "A fig for thy beard! Why do they follow us with all haste even now?"

HADJI (*mumbling*). "A mistake, Sahib, a little mistake, somehow arisen, I know not how; let us go apart and talk together as to what shall be best for all."

MYSELF. "Talk to me with good rupees, then, or I will listen to no words of thine."

HADJI. "The rupees are in my boat, Sahib, following as thou seest!"

MYSELF (*with appalling ferocity*). "Thou liest! As thou hast lied all this night!"

HADJI (*very solemnly*). "By the beard of the Prophet, by Allah the Merciful, the All Loving, I swear the money is in my boat behind there!"

(*This is almost conclusive of truth spoken, and besides, I had to risk something on the impression I could gather at the moment.*)

MYSELF (*pretending to relent somewhat*). "Rahzan, O Rahzan! bring thy lamp closer that I may examine the countenance of this Toucher-Up of the Truth!"

RAHZAN (*nearly singeing the Hadji's red beard off, the precious lime-dyed chin-fringe*). "He lies, Sahib! Trust him not with the precious stones that thou hast so anxiously guarded on the dangerous seas these past two days, and brought hither at such expense. Trust him not, I say! See! I will even now go and lock up the box of priceless rubies in the uttermost recesses of our ship, for as my name is Rahzan, I will outwit these Mazari Rahzans!" ("Tigers of scoundrels").

HADJI. "Sahib! Sahib! Thou hast heard, I have sworn! Let my sons come up from their boat with the money and I will pay thee all as agreed, yea and interest, with expenses also, for I know thou hast incurred much in guarding the stones."

*(This is what I wanted to know, he had brought the money and he wanted the stones back badly.)*

MYSELF *(pacing the deck, slowly going aft, plunged in profound internal debate, or affecting to be so)*. "How shall I bring myself to part with all those glorious jewels? More glorious than the setting sun in color, a king's ransom in worth! Yet was it not part of my bond in the agreement between us? Yes, I will even tear them out of my heart, though that be even as a letting of the blood thereof; but lest a great covetousness come over me at the sight of the stones, I will not look at them. In a closed box shall they pass from my sight forever!"

HADJI *(who has been following my steps like a dog, and who has not missed a word)*. "Yes, Sahib, yes; I, too, have that passion for the red stones. Let all be done as thou desirest, but first open the box a little way that I may greet my precious ones a moment, no more than a moment, Sahib."

MYSELF. "No! a thousand times, no! lest the devil of uncurbable covetousness make of me a liar and a thief!"

HADJI. "But how shall I know that the stones are in the box, Sahib, if it be locked?"

MYSELF *(striking my forehead)*. "Ha! in truth, a difficulty. Yet stay, I have a solution of both our difficulties. Rahzan shall be blindfolded and shall take one stone out of the box at hazard, and if thou art then satisfied, O Hadji, that it is a true ruby, then shall the box be locked immediately and put in thy hand. As for me, I will avert my gaze from the whole transaction; rubies are the dearest lust that can lure me to perdition. I would fling thy money over-side and thee as well, at the sight of the exchange! I will put myself apart from the temptation to violence and evil desire."

HADJI *(oily by this time)*. "So let it be, Sahib! Even as thou sayest, in all particulars!"

And so it was done, with the specimen ruby, up old Rahzan's sleeve all the time. We got the money, the locked box was being passed down to the Hadji's boat (the other boats were far behind, but not too far for the next scene in the comedy)—when the Hadji came up to me and asked a favor, but that belongs to Scene III of our play.

### SCENE III

*Nearing a large steam yacht entirely without lights, scarcely visible in the dark, misty night; and all is silent on board.*

HADJI. "O Sahib, if thou wilt stay thy rowers a little space, Sahib, I will now return to my own boat." (*I believe the old fox still hoped to filch his money back, and thought this would give his "police-men" a chance to catch up with the dhow.*) "I am an old man, not active, as thou seest." (*The old liar! he was as active as a mountain-goat in the Sulaiman valleys of the Pathans.*)

MYSELF (*judging that we were about close enough to the Ranee for the slap-stick finale*). "Swiftly, then, O Hadji, lest I repent even now of my parting with those so priceless blood-red jewels, and fling thy money in thy face!"

HADJI. "Indeed and in truth art thou a Sahib after my own heart, would that we twain had met in early youth and garnered the fairest rubies of earth together."

(The dhow had practically stopped, and I knew a long flowery speech was coming to cover up the approach of the native craft. I prepared a suitable reply, for of course you will see it was my intention to assist the boarding of ourselves, at the right time, in the right

way. I wanted to be sure that the Hadji had not spotted the *Ranee*, and I wanted time to maneuver the dhow across the oncoming native boats.)

HADJI (*continuing his flowery harangue, and warming up to his work*). "Oh, what a Sahib of Sahibs art thou! Even as a dear son art thou to the old Hadji! yea, even as a son that has been long absent in a far country, and is but recently returned to my breast, do I regard thee, O Sahib! Great and powerful must be the race from which thou art sprung, all eloquent, all skilled in affairs, dowered with invincible penetration into all men's minds, and of swift decision!

"When my miserable feet first touched the vast deck of this mighty ship, and the blinding light of thy countenance," *etc., etc., etc., and so on, all while I stood in affable and condescending attention.*

(Rahzan had slipped below and was conning our course, keeping the rowers softly touching the water as required. I had gently led the spouting Hadji aft, so that the sail of the dhow was between him and the *Ranee*. All was set for the finale. A question of moments now; I hoped Casmyth would not fluff his cue.)

MYSELF. "Oh, Hadji! Like a book, and one illumined by most illustrious artists, hast thou spoken! Even though I am not in my first youth, when the fire that burns in a young man straining after fortune is as the fire that glows in the heart of a ruby, even so do I ardently wish that we twain could become brothers in merchandise.

"Yet am I not old, no, nor art thou, O Hadji! except in wisdom. The pearls of speech that thou hast spoken ere now have sunk into my heart, turning to rubies in the fire of my spirit," *etc., etc., etc.*

I kept it up with my back to the oncoming shorecraft full of natives, the mock policemen.

And then!

With a howl came that thieving crew over our side!

Up rushed Rahzan from below, leading our men, who pretended to fight for a moment, and jumped overboard. Rahzan, foaming with simulated rage, rushed up the mast, a bad second, after me. From this momentary security, we flung abuse, threats, imprecations, and occasional prayers for mercy at the precious lot ransacking our dhow for their money. They couldn't find it, of course (we had hidden it too carefully for that)—and soon they were howling together as to who should climb up the mast after me. I was to be bastinadoed of course, if I didn't divulge the hiding-place of the money.

Crash! Bang! Slam! and slam again! went the volleys of musketry!

And with a rousing British cheer, or what was meant to be such, Casmyth, revolver spouting, cutlass flashing (a tin one!), dashed on board, closely followed by his gallant petty officer and merry men!

"Saved! By the Customs cutter," I cried, as the whole lot chased the Hadji and his scoundrels round and round the deck of the dhow!

Some jumped overboard and took to their boats, especially the one with the rubies, as they thought. A few stalwart Customs men soon dragged them out. The others were retrieved by my crew already in the water.

After that "Hare and Hounds" round the dhow, which lasted fully fifteen minutes, when Rahzan had the exquisite pleasure of beating Mohammedans to his heart's content, we rounded the whole bunch up and mustered aft. Lanterns were lit, a chest was placed in front as a table and Casmyth's gallant petty officer produced a warrant for the arrest and hailing to justice of certain opium smugglers on the coast (here followed a careful description of myself—I wrote it)—and cer-

tain Mohammedan merchants, who had, from information received at Dwazka, been guilty of illicit opium trading, with said (hereinbefore described) European opium smuggler.

The whole of the Mohammedans fell to wailing, except the old Hadji, who preserved a decent fortitude. I fell on my knees and did the erring heavy father of a large and starving family, out of work through no fault of my own, etc. Rahzan did the faithful servant, to the life, asking that all blame be attached to him as my corrupter and chief instigator in smuggling.

Casmyth asked the Hadji all kinds of useful questions, on oath, terrible soul-searing invocations to the Prophet, Allah and beards. We got an amazing amount of inside information about the prices of opium in the district. We had been selling about two-hundred per cent too cheap, of course! And to make a long story short, he (Casmyth) impounded the money and the locked box of rubies (full of coal, you know) and placed every one under arrest. We were all tied up as it was.

After a fluent speech about the might of the British Raj, Sirkari rifles (Government and Army), the evils of smuggling, etc., he then said he would, as a matter of grace only, count the rubies and give a receipt to the Hadji for same, for of such is the British Kingdom of Hind.

Some of my crew meanwhile had slipped out of the rear and crept below, and gently paddled the dhow practically alongside the *Ranee*.

I heard some fool cough on board the steamer, so I winked to Casmyth to hurry up the end of the scene.

At a curt order from Casmyth, the gallant petty officer tried to strike off the lock of the ruby box with his (her) cutlass.

And then the fun started!

The cutlass doubled up like a hairpin, and I burst out laughing.

Then we all roared.

And the Hadji and his scoundrels were made to look foolish for all time. When at last the box was opened, and the cobbles of coal poured out on the deck, those Mohammedans fingered it in silence for awhile, turning it this way and that in the light of the lanterns, holding them up, piece by piece, licking the lumps, and at last they started to swear!

Oh, my! what they said!

Our crew was helpless, speechless, with mirth, and I was glad of the presence of the *Ranee* in case the Mohammedans showed some revival of spirit, for Mohammedans are not like Hindus; they always have some fight left.

I began to notice some of the stokehold crew of the *Ranee* in the sea of faces round the lamp-lit chest, and I thought it was quite time to shift the scenery a bit.

I dropped my shackles on the deck, they were only sham, you know, and I ordered the great sail of the dhow to be triced up. Then I swung a lantern dramatically over my head, the prearranged signal for our transformation scene, and immediately the *Ranee* burst into a blaze of light from stem to stern!

Those Mohammedan scoundrels fell on their faces to a man! The whole trick was just what the Prophet would have loved, you know. The poor old Hadji broke down utterly. He wept salt tears! We gave him a regular lecture on the folly of trying to trick Sahibs. Then we put his gang in their boats, blindfolded the Hadji, and led him up the gangway to the saloon of the *Ranee*. We wanted him as a hostage for our next night's work.

The shore gang was ordered off, "jehldi jao," with instructions to come on the following night to a certain place ashore, at a certain hour, and then we got up our anchor and set off to sea once more.

We felt so sorry for the poor old Hadji that we gave him his rubies as soon as he was safely in the saloon. He cheered up at once, of course, and promised all the help we required for our next haul.

After a good meal we all went merrily to bed. The old Hadji full of good wine. The old rip, he was half-crazy with gratitude at the sight of his rubies, and cheerfully violated the most sacred tenets of his creed. Not at our instigation—we couldn't keep him off the champagne!

So ended our merry pantomime.

I often wonder what would have happened if those shore people had found the money on the dhow. They might have fought bitterly, and that would have been all in accordance with the established progress of such "plants" in India. There might have been a horrible tragedy to top off the evening's entertainment. Casmyth pooh-poohed the idea, and said the Customs, costumes and cutlasses (meaning chiefly his own, I fancy) would have quelled anything at first sight.

I wonder.

There is no need to describe our next night's work. It was a great financial success, and we parted with the old Hadji quite regretfully. He was an amusing rogue, full of information about local matters in our line, a judge of stones and pearls worthy even of Mrs. Casmyth's interest, and a match for Rahzan at that game.

As I told you before, we got a lot of fine pearls at Devibunder. There had been a great fishing season up the Gulf that year, and if you ask me, we skimmed the cream of the market. Most people think the big-

gest and best of the pearls go to Bombay direct, and I used to think so too, but I know better now.

I have seen a B. I. (British India) steamer crammed with merchants from the Gulf with lahks and lahks of pearls, and I used to think that they traveled by English boats for safety, having all the finest with them. I know they send the finest pearls overland, by secret messengers, practically singly.

Arab pearl merchants are comic. They pay full first-class fare on the steamers, go down to their cabins, lie in the bunks for half an hour at most, and then rush up on deck to breathe. They rarely go down again, preferring to sleep on their accustomed mats on the deck (first-class saloon), cooking their own food around them as is their wont in the desert or at sea. They are a great nuisance in a way, for they all have fleas and other vermin in abundance.

No Arab of that sort will wantonly kill a flea or a bug on his person. When he has had enough of its attentions, he will catch the little visitor and put it onto his neighbor with compliments, as a gift. The latter will thank the donor in proper form.

That's all very well for them, they are used to it.

But take a passage in a B. I. steamer at the close of the pearl-fishing season and see what sort of a time you get. The cabins are lousy and scrupulously clean at the same time. There is only one season worse, and that is the Arab horse-dealers season.

I will draw the veil over this gruesome subject (according to Western ideas it is gruesome), with a story I heard from a man in Bombay, who had to travel in the B. I. steamers at all seasons. This story deals with a new chum, who wasn't "on" to the precautions old-timers take with the Gulf irritants, and who didn't know enough to wait till the particular season was over and the steamers were disinfected. Our new chum was eaten

alive between Bombay and Karachi, a three-day trip, so he wrote to the Shipping Company, pouring out the accumulated wrath of several Arabian Nights' Entertainment. (Irritation.) He received a full and ample apology by return of post, but unfortunately the idiotic Eurasian shipping-clerk had left his chief's blue-pencil-note attached to the reply. This is what our poor new chum read on the blue-penciled slip,

"Send this guy our bug letter."

Have I digressed? You should know these things if you wish to visit India and try to understand her peoples. Black is white, and right is wrong, and cleanliness is personal prejudice sometimes, in certain places.

The successful Devibunder trip was mostly pearls. A fortune! A few more hauls like that and I was ready to quit. It all seemed a rosy dream of easy money!

I got a shake-up, the very night we left Devibunder.

It was an awful scene of tigerish ferocity, with that Portuguese skipper as the victim.

We caught him, actually at it, filing the Kelvin tubes with a three-cornered file. On that coast that meant a grounding and a total wreck if any weather got up. It was extraordinary how we all jumped to the right conclusion, on the first hint of the skipper's treachery. How clearly it all comes back to me, the warm sticky Gulf night, breathless despite the cool wind of our speed, the misty film on everything the hand touched, the white decks glistening in the saloon lights where the spray swished in under the canvas dodgers to windward. We were all taking a stroll on deck before turning in. About our second turn, I noticed a tiny sharp piercing screech, repeated at regular intervals as we passed a certain storeroom under the bridge.

I could hear it clearly above the rush of our ship through the night, and the smash of the seas forward on our weather bows. The noise had nothing to do with the regular working noises of the steamer either. I am astonished, now I think it over, that Casmyth's trained ear did not catch it. But you can guess what his whole attention was given to, once off the bridge.

At our third turn, I mentioned the noise to my companions.

The effect of my remark was instantaneous, and startling.

Casmyth lifted me onto his shoulders, and I peeped through a ventilator into the storeroom. There was the Portuguese at work, with a shaded light, vise, three-cornered file, and about half our Kelvin tubes!

I think we all went mad with rage!

We broke into the store in a body, and dragged the wretch on deck, intending to take him to the saloon. Mrs. Casmyth interrupted that procedure. I don't know how to tell you the rest, decently, I mean.

She flew at the fellow and gashed his cheeks till the blood streamed down his neck! With her nails! Horrible!

I see that thing tonight as I sit in my little room revising my notes, with the city far below, quiet save for an occasional tram bumping down Madison Avenue close by, and the great liners booming far away, across the street canyons to the west. I shall never forget the Tiger Woman, and her prey! That pasty yellow face in the glare of the deck bulb I switched on, with the reddish-black trickling streams of blood from temple to chin, murder in his eyes, licking his thick lips, and she, the tigress, just pulled off him by Casmyth, panting and working her fingers like claws, aching to be at her victim again. Horrible! I wish I could forget it all!

That was my first sight of *Kali Pervati* in our lady,

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the Tiger Woman of the jungle, whose name is a terror to 300 millions in India.

I hustled the Goanese into a spare deck cabin, locked him in, and put the key in my pocket.

I wish I had never gone back to the saloon. Casmyth and our lady were hard at bitter names there when I went back to them. I saw him raise his hand to strike her, and I cleared out,—like a coward—to walk the bridge till something more appalling than what I had seen should happen. I knew anything might happen, and I was powerless to prevent it.

What tragedy was coming next?

I hoped I would be equal to the unknown emergency, whatever it might be. But I was trembling in all my limbs as I walked the bridge.

The necessity of keeping order on the ship in Casmyth's place steadied me (Vishnu! thy order saveth the whole world continually!), the quartermaster's eyes were too frequently off the binnacle and too frequently on me. He had heard something of the scuffle below, he couldn't help doing so. I dressed him down with a will, steadying myself as I shook him with rattling Hindustani,—and in the middle of it Casmyth came up the bridge ladder. He looked ten years older; I could see that, even in the dim light coming through the chart-house door. He spoke a word to the Q.M., and then looking wearily at me, nodded his head in the direction of the chart room. I followed him in. When the door was shut he sat down, slumped forward with his head on his arms across the table, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

I said what I could.

Then I had the whole bitter story, of recrimination, accusation, and fierce primitive defense—deep wounds given and taken, from weapons tempered in the fierce fire of a mutual passion.

Are there any wounds so deep, so sure in their thrust through the vitals, as those made by weapons that can be snatched out of the fiery flames of a burning passion at the moment when rosy flames turn to the livid white of hate? The same fire, the moment before, had been annealing the metal of two lives a rosy glow, deliciously consuming. Now, a blistering, livid, searing blast of hate!

Much of all this I had to guess; all I was supposed to understand, to apprehend with sympathy, with intuition, that I might quickly provide a solution to the impossible situation those passionate children had made out of life between them.

I know. I've seen it before. I have taken a principal part in such rending of hearts myself. I knew exactly what I was expected to say, when saying anything would be empty word-twisting, and hope hanging like a thread that the listener might say the right thing, a little impulsive syllable creeping timidly to the edge of the turbid stream of your own platitudes.

What can one say?

I ought never to have let my friend become so deeply involved in the love of that lovely woman. Who can prevent that in his dearest friend? To hell with all love of women that comes between two men, I say. Isn't life comic! Perhaps it was only a little difference of gait, of girth, of gesture that kept me from being in the place of my friend that night!

After a time I suggested myself as an intermediary.

I remember also saying that she was only an overgrown child, and so on, and so forth, with a dreary suspicion in my heart that I wished I were the victim, instead of the intermediary. An hour of platitudes.

Casmyth at last pulled himself together, and said:

"Go ahead, old man, you are the best and truest friend a man ever had, help me tonight and I will

bless you till my dying day. I could cut my tongue out for what I have said to her tonight."

Irish lovers still talk like that, you know, believe it or not—to you, to themselves, to the beloved object, that is why they get love wherever they seek it.

"Oh, well," I said, "lovers have tiffs,"—and then I cleared off before his black Irish blood began to boil, at the dilution of his grand tragic despair.

I found the lady—quite drunk—amongst the half-empty champagne and brandy bottles.

There you have the result of mixing East and West in a fine girl to start with! Heaven help the man who gets involved with such hybrid creatures.

I did what I could, just as before I said what I could and thought what I could, and I tell you the whole wasn't much use.

After some indescribable remedies, she was somewhat sensible of her behavior, though still maudlin. I was wretched, sick; sick with fear that Casmyth might come upon us at any moment.

He arrived just as I cleared up the broken bottles.

Then there were tears, and recriminations again. I sweated coldly in the steaming night. Then more tears, and something like Early Victorian hysterics,—and I grew tired to my soul of it all. The gray light of dawn was about us as I crept away, when Casmyth flung himself at her knees and poured out afresh the love he had denied a few hours before.

I knew the reconciliation wasn't far off then, so I slunk off to my cabin, and went to bed.

A few days after, I heard the rest of that night's work and my respect for my friend went up tenfold. He had seized the opportunity to extract a promise from the lady that she would sign a form of solemn pledge, abstaining from liquor, a document to be signed in my presence. The Irish are wonderful, with women.

I didn't sleep much that morning when I slunk off to my cabin, worn out with all those tempestuous emotions, and wearily I crept under the cold shower, about half an hour before breakfast. Fresh air was what I craved, the strong wind that blows among the anchors in a fast ship. I was making my way forward past the bridge in a bit of a roll, when a cheery voice hailed me from above—

“Cambay dead ahead, old boy, come on up!”

## CHAPTER XIII

### BY BULLOCK-CART TO THE INTERIOR

I went up onto the bridge. Casmyth was there, fit and cheerful as a sand-boy. Replighted troth of lovers and an Irish temperament seem to be the true Elixir of Life. What is the Irish secret, their short way to and from sorrow? It isn't flippancy, nor irreverence; I don't know what it is.

I wish I had it.

But of course I never shall, I am only a phlegmatic, fat English business man, not a gallant Irish sea captain, tall, slim and debonair.

Casmyth had been on the bridge since dawn, will you believe it! Except for a bath and a cup of tea and a shave at about 7:00 a. m.

I forget one thing that might have helped to raise all this boyish Irishism in my friend. He had a command now, and a fine one to boot, as he would have said. That works wonders in sea captains, you know, or any other captains, if you ask me. We are only half-men that are not men of power and commandment.

I should explain that the Goanese skipper was to be dealt with after tiffin. That had been arranged overnight. Casmyth seemed to think that the skipper was finished and done with, so in the enthusiasm of the moment I hinted that I could a tale unfold, and that I would do so at our council that was to be held after tiffin. The skipper was now in irons; high-seas illegality, every bit of it, but Casmyth had ample

reasons for adopting such a course. He said as much, "patent scoundrel," "casting the ship away," and so forth.

I was not so sure of the wisdom of those irons, but I couldn't risk the appearance of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. Best to be a bold hunter; hares wouldn't be hares if they were entitled to sympathy. I told Casmyth right out, then and there, that the Goanese had a forged ticket.

Boisterous back-slapping, of course.

All right, nothing lost a friend gets, but—

Lemon-Peel was still legally captain of the ship.

Casmyth was in an irresistible mood, Irish captain and gay comrade, so let it go, I thought. I remembered the wily, temporizing Odysseus of my school days, and I determined to hold my peace, "that all might be for the best in all things." Besides I feared my friend's fiery uncertain temper when he was flicked on his honor.

We were running in sight of the land, with Kathiawar on our starboard bow, two men forward on the look-out, a masthead ditto, and a leadsman outboard only. Such economy in sounding-tubes was due to the Goanese skipper's villany of the previous night. Once past the mouth of the Gulf of Cambay, we could strike east without fear. But Bombay, with gun-boats and a cruiser, for all we knew, was there down east, and in daylight, a chase on the course we must now steer could only have one end. So we had to hug the coast and risk grounding every minute.

At no time were we ever nearer than sixty miles to Bombay, but the little Gulf of Cambay would have been a death-trap to us if we had approached it in the regular lane of traffic.

I say little Gulf; I suppose it is about a hundred and eighty miles long, and nearly a hundred miles wide at the mouth, in a line N.W. from Nasik, above the Bom-

bay side of the Gulf. Things get dwarfed by common usage of big spaces, and compared with the Gulf of Oman, Cambay is a mere estuary. Whatever its size, it was a hornets' nest to us if we bungled our business there at the entrance to the mouth, with Bombay waiting to buzz, at the first sight of us.

But Baroda was too good to miss. That's a great place for adventurous merchants, or smugglers, if you prefer blunt English.

Long live the Barodi! Stout sportsmen, and merry ones, and makers of very good whiskey, to boot.

I had one of the most amazing experiences of my life, in Viramgam, during that part of our voyage, and one nearly as wonderful in Champanir. Compared with those places, the Taj Mahal is a pathetic cockney gravestone. Even greater are they than Bijapore with its seven hundred perfect palaces.

Shall I tell you of the great Gol Gumbaz, which is the greatest dome in the world in some of its dimensions. Yet across it you can hear a pin drop!

Why should I? You would only travel and toil until you saw these things and return home with eyes that could see nothing else till your dying day, as mine do!

Oh Champanir! with thy million restless ghosts, shall my eyes ever alight on thy myriad rosy towers again? Compared with thee, Rome itself is but a cotter's hamlet!

And Viramgam, the mystic lake enclosed by a thousand shrines, each like the gate of paradise, for richness and beauty!

Seek not, I say, to see these wonders of the world, rather keep thy feet from the path of wandering that leads to the beauty that annihilates the warm busy life of modern men.

I may tell you more of these things later.

But I really must tell you a story about Champanir, the peerless and perfect City of the Million Ghosts.

It is as empty now as the palm of your hand, and always will be.

Many years ago, a great and powerful ruler in Hind resolved to repopulate the City of the Dead, to stock her markets, throng her avenues, fill her exquisite marble pools and fountains, and generally defy the Indian tradition of utter silence that has reigned there for hundreds of years.

So the requisite people were transported there in great numbers, and as great diversity, trades and crafts without end. Efficient overseers also were appointed to be over the people, with bureau and offices in the lordly palaces, allotting quarters and employments throughout the length and breadth of the Gorgeous Rose of Cities. So that the city pulsed anew with life—for a few weeks.

Then!—Silence—forevermore as heretofore.

In the night the people fled from all that beauty and comfort.

Why?

Too many ghosts, Sahib! No other reason.

That experiment with ghosts cost millions, and there is no other reason for its failure but—ghosts!

Great was the outcry following the spent millions!

Full long and searching the enquiry there-into!

Mighty the Commissions, sitting in solemn and awful questioning!

Yet was only this answer given unto them.

Ghosts, too many, Sahibs!

I don't ask you to believe this, although it is in the archives, the reasonable, the conservative, the balanced archives of British India.

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Yet, if ever you see Champanir, or even hear a decent description of it, you *will* believe.

“Had I skill in speech,  
Which I have not,  
To make the vision clear,  
I’d say just this—  
*Ghosts, too many, Sahib!*”

I often wish I had been trained in architecture, I love it so. But Casmyth says I could never learn to draw, so what’s the use.

I must get back to sensible business matters at once. After tiffin we had our council or committee about the future of the Goanese skipper.

A very brief affair, and the proceedings rather roughshod, so far as the other two members of the committee were concerned. I am used to discussing matters, thoroughly, pro and con, in proper form, with a view to preventing hasty and premature decisions. After all, one only wants to find out what one can stick by through thick and thin, in life. Whatever you find out, conclusions, decisions, deductions, let there be resolution in the end. That is the good old Persian way, talk a matter out, once sober, and once drunk.

Prohibition may be responsible for a lot of irresolution in the Land of the Eagle, if once the American sense of humor is undermined.

I had to give way of course in that committee; I was a minority vote. I wouldn’t have minded giving way if the matters under consideration had been properly talked out. It was all too hurried, too hasty, with a sense of our immediate danger damning up the flow of sweet reasonableness that makes the work of good committees so valuable. What is that “power of sweet reason” that seems to germinate like the wax from clus-

tering bees, when good men and true gather together, hiving their minds over difficult matters. It isn't the fine words some individual may use; only Frenchmen and Indians think that; I don't know what it is. But this I do know, it is the secret of successful democracy, the divine aspect of rule of the people, both for and by the people.

Well, as I say, we were in grave danger every minute we sat discussing the Goanese. We had to scoop Baroda *at once*, or clear out. The skipper was better in irons till that was over. I had to admit it, and so it was arranged. Casmyth became captain in the fullest sense of the word, from that moment, and when he reminded me of our conversation of the morning, I got up and fetched the Goanese's papers without a word; yet I had some scruples, you know. I had extorted the confession of fraudulent rank from the scoundrel, tacitly, as a personal secret. Before I took *my* hands off those folded documents, I made Casmyth promise he would keep *his* hands off the Goanese. That's how I put it; those were my very words.

Frankly, I wished I could have backed out of that promise to "blow" the skipper. But I had spoken, and I was too deep in now to do it.

How gleefully a Scotchman would have enlarged upon that hasty speech of mine, with his long boring punctuation of its microscopic significances.

The committee broke up after settling our plans for the next landing party. We were to take every precaution to have the agents ashore properly informed of our change in procedure. They were not to come down to the *Ranee*, not even to the creek where we proposed to run in with the felucca.

The invaluable Rahzan was carefully versed in the plan of action, and was to have two days and nights

ashore for his part of our purpose. On the third night, he was to come for the consignment with bullock carts, half a dozen, though one would really be enough. But our scheme was to pretend that the carts were carrying cakes of dried cow-dung, the commonest form of haulage in India. No one ever remarks on the passage of such merchandise anywhere, for dried, it is by no means offensive to any of the senses. Rather the reverse, once you get over Western prejudice of association. The dried cakes form one of the principal objects of industry in India, the collecting, compounding, kneading and drying of the "stuff" employs thousands of people. The cakes, when sufficiently matured in the sun, are piled up like small mountains, outside every town or village in India, and the whole population resort to the merchants who deal in the cakes, on every conceivable occasion, for nearly every conceivable purpose, from building-requirements to critical medicinal ones.

Broken up, and allowed to stand in a pail of water for some time, a fluid is produced that makes an excellent "varnish" for a dried earth floor; practically all the lower and lower middle classes (say 300,000,000 people) use this "varnish" daily in their houses, on floors and verandahs.

All the best tennis-courts in India are made with it, on an earth or "muttee" base—the finest court in the world, for accuracy and foot-comfort. You talk of your Western champions at tennis; the Indians would wipe the floor with them, if it was a cow-dung "floor," such as they are trained on.

The cakes make a slow but steady fire for all domestic purposes, if properly tended.

The smell of those domestic fires is the essential smell of India, and once you get to like that incense in your nostrils, and know you like it, say good-by

to the West forever. You can never be happy again, away from it.

You are beginning to see why the cow is sacred in India, an object of tender and sometimes humorous veneration. Rather like a charming but spoilt child of a very important family.

Briefly, there are dozens of uses for those cakes of comic merchandise, and they are always on the move from place to place. Therefore we had decided it was the best cloak for opium.

*"Pariter facta atque infecta canebat."*

But no dog would bark at our innocuous appearance. So that we Westerners should not be in the company of such an exotic caravan, a swift pair of trotting bullocks in a "dhamni," a sort of enclosed jaunting-car, was to be provided by Rahzan, and we were to precede the consignment to the place of transfer arranged with the agents in the interior,—the home of the principal agent, as a matter of fact.

This place of meeting, counting-house, what you will, was an old plaster-and-brick mansion, whitewashed, carved, fretted, painted, and be-pinnaced like a mosque. I use the word mosque loosely, for we were dealing with Hindoos who have no mosques, but the mansion was domed and pinnaced all over like one, so the word is acceptable, as it conveys to you briefly the whole "works in the wood." The mansion stood in a thick clump of palm-trees, off the river road about half a mile, the river running down to the creek where our dhow was hidden. Rahzan gave us a minute description of the mansion and very careful directions for finding it.

Our whole plan was simple, and therefore more likely to be effective. But for the fact that we were dealing in opium it *would* have been effective, and the con-

signment would never have given us a moment's anxiety.

We "sweated blood" over that consignment, for hours on end.

The last person we suspected in the world was the cause of all the trouble, but those agonies belong to the next chapter.

We had a merry dinner-party the night before the landing took place. Why not? All was risk there, quiet or noisy. It only needed one slip on Rahzan's part to put the whole Revenue gang on our trail, so we were indifferent about noise on the *Ranee*. Ashore, it was another matter, and we were not going ashore until we had the sign from Rahzan that all was well there.

After dinner I left those lovers to their bliss, a bliss that seemed to be intensified by their recent quarrel. I walked the dark decks till it should be time to set out. I had much to think about in my quartering to and fro under the lamping stars of Hind. I had to acquire, sooner or later, an indifference to all soft and tender matters, if responsibility was to remain in our midst at all. My chief difficulty was thrusting out envy of my friend's happiness, so full, so intense, so obviously and essentially exclusive of myself.

Yes, I had to get used to that.

Damn all women's love and lovely women who come between the rare friendship of men. I might as well begin to say good-bye to Casmyth, right now.

I began.

Good-bye, you gallant, rattling, roving, gay comrade, of the facile tears, the swift in jest, swifter in sympathy for the sorrow of others, swiftest in aid of the needy, sparing no whit of your person or purse. No man alive ever asked you twice for help; many got it that never dared to ask, and no man ever got a bill of costs from you in the cause of friendship.

Good-bye I say, you wild Irishman! I wish I had some of your hot generous blood in my cool heart.

I tell you passion burns and true friendship warms; perhaps the day will come when passion has burned you out and you will stand shivering and in need of a little gentle warmth, such as I can give you!

The day did come, you know.

But my friend didn't, even though I had long finished my apostrophe to a friend in love. He kept me kicking my heels on deck till I warned him for the third time that the dhow was in the water, manned and waiting,—and I was going without him.

He came at last, and so did the lady, both so wreathed in smiles, and so exuding ecstatic bliss that I could scarcely bear the sight of them. Well, as I have said before in my prosy way, there is nothing lost a friend gets, and by the signs, I guessed that a vital question had been asked and answered, to their mutual satisfaction, the question that seems to confer a beatific certitude concerning the happiness of the parties involved, and in some mysterious way confirms them in the opinion that the welfare of all the rest of the world at large is at last assured.

Casmyth behaved like a midshipman out for a lark. I had to speak a word of warning as we slipped between the mangrove-matted banks of our chosen creek. That only produced some of his detestable back-slapping, the brogue-ish sort, the worst sort, almost continuous.

I nearly forgot to mention one thing that happened as we pushed off from the *Ranee*.

The lady waved us adieu, at the top of the gangway, as we turned in the current of the Gulf, and I said softly to her—

“Keep a sharp watch on the Goanese.”

“Of course, Stanley, you can trust me for that.”

The second time she had ever called me by that name! The third and last time was in the Red Sea, just before she was drowned in those ever-tragic waters.

I hear her voice in my ears still.

She was drunk at the time.

We searched those dark waters for hours, trying to find her, in fear of our lives every moment. But she never came to the surface, that is my belief, after the waters closed over her. She had a heavy fur-coat on over her thin evening-gown, and she never struck out to save her life. How could she?

I suppose I ought to be glad it was not in my avatar to marry a lovely drunken woman. Yet I confess I would have jumped at the chance if it had been offered. All that must be told in its proper place.

I must get back to those emeralds of Baroda.

That haul in Cambay Gulf was a good one. Mostly emeralds, as I say, in payment; old stuff cut in an old-fashioned way, and none the worse for that. That flashy way of cutting emeralds is fortunately falling into disrepute. I never could understand the use of covering such stones with innumerable facets in an attempt to make them sparkle and throw out fire. Diamonds (which are essentially vulgar) may be cut so, for those who like them, but the mysterious colored fire burning in the hearts of emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and such aristocratic stones—that should be left there, with just enough window space cleared to peep through!

Where those Baroda emeralds came from, I do not know, nor did Rahzan know. From ancient Golconda probably, in the far country of Ellora.

Now for a curious experience ashore with that haul which we referred to ever after as the “emerald haul.”

As you know, it was on the third night of our stay in Cambay, at the head of the Gulf, opposite the Barodi

shore, that the felucca had been run up a creek as far as we dared go. The rest of the journey had to be done in bullock carts, and the consignment was safely loaded and covered over with cow-dung cakes. Then we got into the "dhamni" and drove off.

The trotting bullocks are big leggy animals, so we soon outdistanced the heavy-trade bullocks, and in the dark the latter missed the road and went off into the blue of the Indian night. We didn't know that when we arrived at the mansion of the agents; there, everything was in accordance with the plan as previously arranged. So we all retired into the great white mosque-mansion, ushered in with the satisfying ceremonies between host and honored guest wherein the East is pre-eminent for all time.

There were refreshments, of the kind that Indians always assume will be most acceptable to Westerners, viz., whiskey, and the everlasting "dahk bungalow chicken," which merely means a very tough one. Chicken boiled, chicken roasted, curried, jellied, boned and stuffed, and all like rags of mildewed calico for flavor and texture.

That supper is worth recording in detail.

This is Casmyth, to our hosts:

"How kind of you to provide a good meal for us."

CHIEF HOST (*an enthusiastic student of English, spokesman of the party*).

"You are damn welcome, oh by god! Eeffeicient pleasure in making totally welcome all guest are Hindu delicacy of courtesy."

CASMYTH. "Not at all."

They *were* Hindus of sorts, so we could not expect beef, but a good mutton curry, such as those people alone can make, is like ambrosia and manna mixed. But of course we couldn't ask for anything that was not in sight, for our entertainment.

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CASMYTH. "Delicious chicken, I must say." (*Aside, "Ugh!"*)

MYSELF (*also aside*). "Damn welcome, oh by god, did you get that?"

CASMYTH. "I'll never be able to swallow a mouthful of this stuff; get them out of the room somehow and I'll sling a few of those barn-door roosters out of the window."

MYSELF. "Righto, I'll try. (*To hosts.*) It has occurred to me that our consignment is nearly due to arrive (*looking at my watch*). Yes! Is that the carts creaking I hear? Indeed I believe so; my anxiety is relieved, I will go out to meet them if you will excuse me."

HOST. "Greatest heartfelt sensation of good will amongst all as in ancient English Yule-tide period manners and customs. Ha! Ha! All present parties will encumber you with supernumerary presence by your kind permission."

MYSELF (*aside to Casmyth*). "Suspicious lot of blighters! Get to your dirty work, and sling the beastly chickens well out into the bushes."

(*To host.*) "Oh please don't trouble to come with me, it is quite unnecessary, I assure you!"

HOST. "Excusing self and friends as one man, what is trouble in friendship's name, Sar?"

(*All hosts follow me out, and we walk to the compound gate. Crashes are heard in the bushes behind us.*)

MYSELF. "You have many flying foxes in this part of the country" (*a species of large clumsy bat as big as an owl*)—"I hear them at your figs, I think!"

HOST. "Oah yess, Sar! blasted aerial renard is god-damn nuisance. Ha! Ha!"

MYSELF. "Ha! Ha! Very good indeed! I must remember your witticism, Sir. But I think I must have

been mistaken, there is no sign of the bullock carts in the road."

HOST. "Roads are long and carts *est brevis*, Sar! That is one very fine classical allusion, Sar!"

MYSELF. "Pardon me, Sir, *Ars est longa* would be better than *Cars est longa*, I think."

(*Follows 'discussion longa' on our idiotic Indian-English pun, meantime I guess Casmyth will have arranged bones on plates, etc. I really was getting a bit anxious about the 'Cars longa' by this time. We couldn't stand there jawing all night however, so back to the feast we all went.*)

MYSELF. "Yes, I was mistaken about the carts, we will return to your excellent food, Sir."

CASMYTH (*aside to me as I re-enter*). "What price me for Jack the Giant-killer? Did you hear anything in the bushes?"

MYSELF. "Did I hear anything! I thought you were heaving half the furniture into the bushes, you clumsy ass. I had to tell them it was the bats in the fruit-trees."

CASMYTH. "Sure I thought they'd think 'twas the bats meself."

(*I didn't like this lapse into the brogue; he was up to some devilry.*)

CASMYTH (*to our host*). "'Tis a fine breed of birds ye have here in your country, Sorr, strong nervy nimble animals in their health, I dare be sworn. I mean the delicious chickens, friend, have ye any more in the coop, by any chance?"

HOST. "Flocks of birds of the same feather are all together in back compound, Sar!"

CASMYTH. "Then take an Irishman's advice, that slept in the same bed with chickens, and the pig to boot bedad on cold nights, keep thim away from wather,

ye'll rust their iron constitutions on thim if once they get a taste for it."

Even my friend's foolery could not banish the thought from my mind that the consignment was long overdue. At last I turned to him and said,

"Look here, Casmyth, those drivers have bolted with our opium, they should have been here an hour ago."

CASMYTH. "Impossible, where could they bolt to? Ahmedabad?"

MYSELF. "Well, I'm going back to look for them."

"And who is to stay with our host?"

"You must."

"Thank you, kind Sir, nothing doing; I'm coming with you."

"Then you will ruin the whole show, these people are getting suspicious already, just look at them."

"You're right, I'll have to stop. Buck up, old scout, though; if another chicken says 'peep' in the back yard, I'll faint."

"Good enough, I will be back in any case in an hour, unless I am sandbagged on the road by thugs. Beat it for the *Ranee* if I am not back inside the hour."

MYSELF (*to host*). "I fear some trifling accident has delayed the carts, have you a spare dhamni I could borrow for half an hour to go in search of them?"

HOST. "Eminent satisfaction to provide adequate transporting facilities as requisite, Sar."

So off I went in the dhamni. I was not afraid for Rahzan who was with the consignment, that genial blackguard could take care of himself in any circumstance. The Baluchis are like the Irish in that respect, and in many others. But I was afraid for the lady on the *Ranee*, and in some measure for my friend and myself.

We were surrounded by danger the whole time we

stayed in Cambay. Baroda, I mean the Marajah, keeps all kinds of officers around him, mostly English, and they run the Army, Police and Customs, *zuberdhasti* fellows who would scoop up our consignment, and us and the *Ranee* without turning a hair, and without waiting for any more authority than their own common sense. Baroda isn't like an ordinary native state where a little Western prestige pulls the wool over the eyes of the whole populace. Indeed, Baroda is the only place in all our voyaging that wasn't an example of unfair advantage taken over the natives. Those easy commercial triumphs that a certain class of British merchant mistakes for the evidence of racial superiority. Little better than a lot of damned thimble rigging, like our table-water stunt. It isn't far from that to out-and-out knavery like our opium trafficking. You're lucky if you pull out of that sort of thing with any self-respect at all. I was, anyway, and I consider myself very lucky to be able to end my days in a decent shipping office with respectable people in New York. You should meet some of the awful creatures who never had the chance to pull out as I did, rolling in money and sunk to the lowest depths of degradation. They would jump at the chance of a few years in prison if that would entitle them to speech with men of their own caste.

But I must go back to our consignment, lost in the wilds of Baroda.

By the merest chance I took the right road at a fork away back on our tracks, and after going for miles straight ahead in the dark, I found the whole lot stuck on a little island in the middle of a river, afraid to go forward or come back! Do you think that is too much of a good thing, stumbling on those carts in the middle of a vast plain, in the dead of night, with

dozens of other roads that I might have taken leading away from them? That's nothing, the long arm of coincidence can do anything to stirring adventurers; why, we ran into Redwin, the aviator, on the edge of the Syrian desert; he had made a landing for inspection purposes there, and he took us several hundred miles in his plane along the line of our weary wanderings. But that was many, many days ahead—I tell you the people who sit on a stool all their lives, safely, hedge themselves about from nearly all possible coincidence, good or bad, and they don't know what is possible, what does actually happen every day to the men they call rovers.

Well, Rahzan never explained satisfactorily how he came to miss the road in the dark, but I suspect he got to taking a little opium out of the consignment, and then a little more, just for comfort you know, and then he went to sleep, the deep delicious sleep of the drug that makes a bed of sharp stones like a celestial couch. The drivers wouldn't say a word till they had boxed up everything good and plenty. They know Baluchis of old, they say Bad-log or Bal-log or Bal-luch indifferently, meaning the same thing, and that is blackguard. Beatings and Baluchs go hand in hand, so those drivers would think. They were right too. As soon as Rahzan did get the fact into his muzzy noodle, that the whole works was balled up in the middle of a river in the heart of Baroda, he beat the drivers and the bullocks into a state of sullen balkiness. They would not budge an inch, one way or the other.

I don't blame them, an Indian river in the dark may be any width or depth, further on, and then there are always water snakes to think of.

All water snakes are deadly.

Rahzan plunged into the river and waded and swam

to me as soon as I gave him a hail. I asked Rahzan how on earth he had managed to get so far into the river, and why he hadn't made his people pull out.

"Snakes, and fear of the night devils, Sahib. I beat them out of the middle of the river, their fear of me being greater than that of devils, but when we reached the islet they had time to reflect and they refused to make further movement till daylight. My arm is weary with beating men and bullocks, also I will not twist bullocks tails off," (no uncommon thing in a tight place in India, even though the driver loves his bullocks like his own children; hard for you to understand, I know, but I can't help that, you must take my word for it.)

"Well, Rahzan, what are we going to do?"

"Sahib, listen a little patiently I beg, those sons of noseless women will not make their bullocks move, they are in league together, and both are in fear of devils. If we take the fearless white bullocks out of thy dhamni (no need to spoil good silk and velvet by taking *them* into the water)—then we may harness the white bullocks to the carts, making several journeys hither and yon, so shall we retrieve thy property Sahib, but as for those ——— sons of ———" (appalling language feebly rebuked by me) "——— those devils of drivers can drown for ought I care."

So we did.

The white bullocks went at everything at the run, and on the second journey the compact between the brown bullocks and their drivers was broken, doubtless by mutual consent, for the whole lot rushed into the water together and we were soon on the near bank, soaked, but merry, as men will be when a hearty good will displaces sullen mutiny, and a grave difficulty is overcome by resolution and rousing, noisy courage.

We retrieved everything safely but it was nearly

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daylight when I got back to the mosque in the palm grove.

Of course Casmyth was gone.

He had left a note. Here it is.

"D. W.

If you come soon after this is left, come straight on to the felucca. If later, hang up here and send a messenger. I will wait till tomorrow, and shall return here at night-fall.

G. C.

P. S. It is now 11:30 p. m. Our host is following me with a large English dictionary. I must fly."

You will understand we still called the dhow by her old name, the felucca, and so she remained till we sank her off Perim, when we had to cut and run from the gun-boats.

Casmyth was right. It would never do for me to be seen in those parts in the daylight.

I arrived with the opium covered with plantain leaves, for the cow-dung cakes had all floated away down the river, much to the disgust of the drivers who had hoped to get them as a perquisite. Such treasure trove is dear to their simple hearts.

My hosts were twittering with fright. I had to tell them half a dozen times over how I had come to find the carts in the river; they could not understand such boldness of decision that could take a single road among several and persevere to the end on it. They would have gone back and forth on the roads till broad daylight. Why? I don't know. Too intelligent, or the other thing.

All was pleasant once again. I sent Rahzan back to the felucca with a note for Casmyth, saying that all was well; the day I spent in sleep mostly, with a surreptitious "scout around" in the late afternoon, for

the traces of those tough chickens in the bushes. No sign, of course, the jackals or the pie-dogs got them, I suppose, in the night. The place was infested with pie-dogs, as are most Indian compounds in the districts, beastly yellow brutes living on offal, and loathsome with mange and other diseases.

Hindus won't kill anything except in case of extreme necessity, so the pie-dogs multiply as they like, in scrofulous fecundity. When you have once seen them you will understand why a Mohammedan says to a Hindu, "May yellow dogs defile the graves of thy ancestors," speaking in anger, of course.

I got up for tea, taken with my hosts, and talked till my head ached with mixed metaphors, Hindu-English, English-Hindu.

My host surpassed himself in pearls of exquisite English, tea being described as—

"The cup that cheers but stingeth not."

In the evening Casmyth arrived with our lady. I was aghast at such folly! She had left the *Ranee*, with the proper escort for such a person in India, in full Indian dress, veil (it suited her mightily), innumerable anklets, bracelets, nose-ring, etc., etc. She dropped the disguise when she arrived at the mosque, saying she was English, a relative of Casmyth, and that she had embraced the Hindu faith. She had no difficulty in passing as an English woman, her speech was perfect, and so was her behavior. Yet I thought that the younger men in the house looked at her very curiously once or twice. Some little gesture, or look, or flick of the finger, perhaps, arrested their attention. The fine significances of such things in India are almost beyond our powers of recognition. My fear was that our lady might slough her English skin in some impulsive moment, and then the fat would be in the fire. While she acted, consciously, there was no danger; she was far

too much above our hosts in birth, in breeding, in training, to be embarrassed by their normal scrutiny. All women are actresses, so she was not brought to task by our hosts.

I was annoyed at her presence, just the same. That Goanese skipper was on my mind, you know. We had left him in irons, it is true, but the slippery beggar had friends on the *Ranee* of his own breed, among the stewards, and he was now unguarded except for the old serang. The chief engineer was not the sort of man to interfere unless his engines were jeopardized in some way; that situation arose later, as I shall tell you, and then the chief showed the metal he was made of. For all practical purposes the Goanese was unguarded on the ship, and I was afraid. I was glad when the emeralds were at last appraised and the opium turned over to the Hindus. I did not breathe freely till I went into the cabin and unshackled the derated skipper.

We pulled our anchors out of the mud soon after we got on board, and set off at half-speed down the Gulf of Cambay.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A WEDDING ON BOARD

Casmyth was in a seventh heaven of happiness. As I have hinted, he had induced our lady to promise to be his wife, and nothing now would satisfy him but a quick trip to Bombay for the wedding ceremony. I congratulated him, of course. But his Bombay proposal "gave me furiously to think." Such an entry into the very jaws of our enemies was madness. Yet how could I convince my friend? Married he would be—and at once. He had his little scheme all worked out, for a landing up by Warli River northeast of Bombay Harbor, disguises for me and so forth. But I simply could not let that thing go past me.

I paced the deck for hours, trying to think out a solution of the matter, and then suddenly the problem solved itself. The Goanese sent to me to ask for some books, particularly did he wish for his Bible, he was still locked up, you know, though out of irons. Then I remembered that all Goanese are religious folk, even habitual criminals. Don't ask me how they manage it; they do, as everybody East of Aden will tell you.

Click! something opened in my brain like a little window; I had it! The Goanese was still capable of performing the much desired matrimonial ceremony if we reinstated him for an hour as Captain. And he would perform the ceremony with all proper solemnity too, mark that!

It seems rather cynical, but that is exactly what we did. I still think it was the wisest thing to do under the circumstances. Personally, I should not like the idea of being married by a Goanese at all, least of all by one of that kind. Those two love-birds didn't mind in the least though, and hailed the idea as a heaven-sent one.

They set about their preparations in high glee, just like any other pair of lovers on shore, with papas, and mammas, and relatives, and girl friends, and lawyers and parsons joining in the elaborate festival, or ceremonial, or whatever fancy name you prefer for a simple pact between two rational human beings. An exchange of vows that are solemn only if both parties to the pact realize that it involves the continual application of the whole of their powers, bodily, mental and spiritual, for the rest of their lives, and, I think, beyond that, too.

All the cathedrals in the world won't make flippant people realize that. Most people do go into marriage flippantly and that is why they flip out of it so often when the first really solemn thing comes along, the first thing that, if seriously grappled and overcome, would make them realize the divine beauty of sexual relationship. However, these things are only for those who want them, like all the rest of the beauty in the world.

The skipper was a Catholic, like all Goanese, and he admitted he was competent to perform the ceremony we desired. He made certain conditions, though, and I don't blame him for that.

I think now, as I look back on it all with a calm mind, that he meant to lull us into a sense of security till he could strike again. But I wasn't calm then, though I tried to be, and certainly neither of the "contracting parties" was in a state of mind to scrutinize anything

calmly. I should have been put on my guard by the readiness to fall in with my scheme which the Goanese showed. His readiness was too facile, particularly when you remember that he was madly in love with the lady.

Just think what that marriage meant to him, a Catholic!

He meant to have the lady just the same, in the end, and he very nearly succeeded, too.

I tell you he was half-crazy with love, that Goanese! The conditions he made were not too startling, naturally. Briefly, he was to be made second in command, with a good-conduct reward of full command at a later date, to be fixed by us. I liked the idea, but Casmyth boggled at it at first. However, he was far too happy to stick there for any time.

So all was arranged in that manner.

I must say the Goanese behaved well. He took his religion very seriously, and that helped him if he was acting a part, as I strongly suspect now. All Goanese, good or bad, are sincerely religious people, as you know: punctilious and serious in their attention to the exercises demanded by their church, and when of a good stamp, thoroughly trustworthy and capable. The original stock they come from was probably the finest maritime race the world has ever seen, bold intrepid adventurers, scouring the seven seas of the world for treasure and trade and the conquest of continents, in a day when seafaring was hazardous enough to daunt the most fearless, even the sturdy hearts that God has always put into seamen.

You have only to look at their portraits carved over doors and embellishing porticoes in the numerous fortresses they built along the coast of Cambay, and southward down to Calicut, to see the sort of men they were. They frown you down like lions, those portraits, to this day.

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Those fortresses were amazing works of art and science. I mean just that. Graceful structural art, and vigorous military science, combined; hand in hand they worked, neither quite happy without the presence of the other, like lovely wife and bold strong husband. Those fortresses usually have an exquisite church-like ruin in the heart of them. Think of that, a handful of Christian colonists plunged into the night of Paganism! Those were bad times in India, for a period of appalling tyranny and vice had set in among the ruling castes. The land was full of wicked, ruthless, brutal lords, who debased their innumerable retainers, and ground the face of the people to support them in wickedness and violence.

If God sent the early Goanese to scourge those wicked men, He knew what He was about. I'll take my oath they scourged them with scorpions for whips!

The first Portuguese adventurers (progenitors of the Goanese) built those lonely outposts in the face of the most numerous and bloodthirsty foes an intrepid foreign trader has ever encountered.

Crossing perilous seas, uncharted for the most part, in clumsy, unhandy, unsanitary ships! At sea for half a year—what do I say? Half a year! Why, the captain of the first *Black Star*, a full-rigged ship of the fastest and finest model of sailing-craft the world has ever seen, told me today that he was once dismasted and took a hundred and nineteen days from Durban to Liverpool, half the journey from Portugal to India. If I had said those early Goanese were a year at sea sometimes, you might say something.

And then there were mutiny, disease and famine aboard, with death by fire and sword of enemies always imminent. What sagas may yet be written of the innumerable ventures lost, and greater sagas yet of those who only saved themselves for a life of perilous

and vigorous beauty in a land of bloody and implacable enemies.

How are the mighty fallen—and why?

They intermarried habitually with the Indians.

To this day the Goanese, the Diuese of Cambay, are all that remain of that mighty seed of Empire.

An outcaste community of menial servants, for the most part.

Their vast possessions of territory shrunk to the ruins of one great city, Goa.

Pity every Goanese you meet. A fire may still be surprised smoldering dimly behind the eyes that must glance sideways from that of his fortunate Western master, knowing in the false quantity of his Indian blood that he has many avatars of expiating slavery to pass through to mastery again.

So I pitied that wretched skipper and took his part in some measure. I lived to regret it.

I was best man at the Casmyth wedding, and the chief engineer was the other witness.

The bride was lovely.

Rice was abundant (naturally, being in the paddy country), and handsomely showered.

The crew of the *Shah Jehan* were the great surprise of the ceremony, the *pièce de résistance*. They had a number of musicians amongst them, so it turned out, and each had procured his peculiar instrument (very) since their sojourn on the *Ranee*. They played a weird and wonderful rendering of the Wedding March—horrible!

And they played most sweetly at the wedding breakfast, old Indian tremoloso twitterings; there is no other way of describing such indescribable small sweetness of sound, of melody, if such things are melody.

You can imagine the gala day the crew had of it,

as we lay at anchor half-way down the waters of Cambay. Casmyth danced a hornpipe, and danced right well, after drinking more wine than was good for him or his prestige as commander of the ship. His lady was far too happy to exceed in that way, even laying a restraining hand on her husband, at the last.

A good sign, that, I thought. All augured well for the happy couple. How happy they were!

We stayed at anchor four happy days there. To hell with the Customs, and the Royal British Navy too, if there's a lovely bride to be made happy!

I made a trip to Ahmadabad, and thence to Viramgam on the second day, spending nearly two days there; I wish it had been years. I went back to the *Ranee* on the fourth day, tired and travel-stained, but aglow with the wondrous beauty of that walled city situated at the end of all known things. The only man I have met in all my travels who had seen the Sacred Lake of Viramgam and its myriad shrines was an American missionary; he had seen God's wonders all over the world, and I think all man's wonders too. He agreed with me that there was only one thing to compare with the wonder of the Sacred Lake, and that was the sight of the city itself.

On my return to the *Ranee* I spent a good deal of time alone, as you can imagine, and much was spent in trying to bring myself to speak about ending our trafficking in opium. We had enough money and treasure to satisfy every reasonable human need. Why tempt kind fortune further?

I had made up my mind to speak to the happy pair in this way, at the first moment that I thought they would be in a fit state to listen to such serious mundane affairs. I fancied they would both take a rather different view of our past way of life. Marriage has that sobering effect on some people, you know. It is a de-

lightful sobriety, there is nothing finer on earth, before the "heavy father" period sets in.

I was mistaken.

Those two were different.

On the evening of the fifth day of our stay in Cam-bay, after the marriage I mean, Casmyth noticed some of the hands getting a bit slack, about the ship. Hands in pockets as you pass, that sort of thing. Smiles of course, and geniality generally, but—on a ship! Really, at sea!

Well, he came aft to the saloon where I was writing some of the notes from which these pages are compiled. I had just dismissed the purser after checking all the ship's accounts, when Casmyth bounced in. There is no other word for it. Bounced like a bounder, which he was not. But he was full of haughty ship's discipline, you must know.

Confound all Irish sea-captains. He took exception to the way the purser, an excellent Parsee, made way for him in the saloon doorway. He dressed the poor fellow down with quite unnecessary heat and vigor, I thought.

In fine, our Captain wanted to be off to sea, at once. The crew were getting slack through lack of work, and so forth.

"Very well"—I was agreeable, "and when we have the ship once more under way, please let us have a conference about our future movements—all our future movements."

"Certainly, quite right, old boy, can't run a ship without proper sailing directions and port of destination."

And then he was off to his beloved bridge. The new beloved bride forgotten for the moment, I do believe.

I went back to my papers and forgot him and the ship, too, as soon as I heard the anchors coming home. I had set myself to sorting out cogent matters from my

notes, with a view to entering them in the ship's official log. Not quite in order, I know; the items should be made on the day they occur, but we were not quite so "pukka" as all that. I kept an unofficial log as I say, the whole time I was on the *Ranee*, and the official one, part of the time. The latter is at the bottom of the Red Sea now. I like keeping things in order, in orderly state of record; I am a Brahmin of the Brahmins in the matter of records and correspondence, that is why I like life in America, where the filing systems of some business men would win the approval of Vishnu, the Lord of Order. I am particularly proud of the log of the *Shah Jehan*, it was kept under such great difficulty. I have the log of that ill-fated vessel before me as I write. It is an interesting document and I may include it as part of the addenda to this narrative. It may interest and perhaps amuse some of my seafaring readers to criticize the work of an amateur "Second." You see how easy it is for me to get immersed in such matters. I was roughly shaken out of my gentle occupations.

Suddenly there was a shout forward, a patter of feet on the deck overhead, and a roar from Casmyth on the bridge, then confused shouting ending in a shriek. I jumped up the companion-way, tumbling over a steward who was peeping out of the companion doorway.

There was a crowd near the bridge, and into it I shoved. Casmyth was there kneeling over the chief engineer on the deck. Heavens! I thought, is there another traitor in our midst?

The engineer had been badly knifed, and Casmyth was looking at the wound in his side. It seems that the engineer had found his oil tanks nearly empty, since his last examination the previous day, and with a truly Chinese power of deduction had dropped on the

Goanese as the culprit. Followed a swift battle with knives and a bad wound for the engineer.

Now the skipper never confessed that crime, though I brought every conceivable kind of pressure to bear on him to extort the truth, but I believe the engineer was right, although he had no more definite proof for his original accusation than I had after days of examination and sifting of evidence.

Casmyth was for putting the fellow on shore at once, and so was his wife. I couldn't agree to that. We had no proof.

But what were we to do? No trouble ever occurred on the ship unless that skipper was at large, and then there was no end to it.

At a council in the saloon, we decided to clap the fellow in irons again. That was a stormy meeting, for I had to stick by my protégé; he had somehow become such, in the comic turn about of life. It was my suggestion that he should be released for the wedding; it was my suggestion that we accept his proposal to become second in command; it was my suggestion this, and my suggestion that—all through the council in the saloon.

Even if a friend runs me hard like that, it is my habit to let the friend, "the dear enemy," expose all forces, particularly heavy artillery, and when they are well out in the open, capture the lot and turn them full blast on the adversary. I accepted all responsibility for the suggestions, for our present situation (oil for only half a day's slow running), and I declined to make any more "suggestions" in regard to the solution of our difficulties unless the Goanese was turned over to me unconditionally.

How I detested the sight of my protégé, and yet, I couldn't help admiring him in a way; he was one among a host, all against him, and he could still find the reso-

lution in himself to encompass 'desperate deeds. I thought of those portraits at Dhiu, at Goa, at Bandra, those lion-hearted men—his ancestors. They too knew what it meant to be alone in the midst of hosts of enemies, each day of life purchased by deeds more desperate than those of the preceding one, when courage must be a roof held over head and heart, at arm's length continually. Yet I could not withstand my friends in the matter of the leg-irons, despite my sneaking sympathy for the Goanese.

When I declared at the council in the saloon that I would undertake to solve our oil difficulties if the Goanese was turned over to me, I had a hazy idea of what I meant to do, and that was to send him down to Bombay with Casmyth to get the oil we needed. On further thought I decided to abandon that idea, and to go myself after the oil, using the Goanese as the cat's paw. I had to abandon *that* idea, too, when I found out the beggar's record in Bombay, and boldly negotiate for the oil myself, after fixing the fellow so that he was powerless for a month or two.

The Goanese was useless to us—ashore half-way down the Gulf of Cambay, and dangerous too; so I had to take him with me.

The *Ranee* was now only capable of half a day's run at half-speed, say a hundred and twenty miles, just enough to get us to Devibunder. I decided to make that our rendezvous. I had an idea even then that we were in a kind of trap up the Gulf there, and the sooner we were out between the jaws of it the better I would be pleased. Why we were ever allowed to get out of that trap I do not know, and it is no use worrying about it now; we did get out and I got the oil and Casmyth made the rendezvous just as if we had been ordinary respectable shippers instead of a lot of smugglers with a price already on our heads.

It was evident that I must now race down to Bombay and undertake the dangerous work of getting a lot of oil as a private person, for unspecified purposes, with only a Goanese to help me, and I did not deceive myself much about the kind of help I should get in that quarter.

Fortunately, I did not know just how desperate our situation was, as I have hinted; indeed it seemed to me then that the matter had a very happy aspect, it would give the newly married couple a proper honeymoon, alone, with their dreams, on a fine ship, and with a new Indian moon to crown all.

Some people have big slices of luck altogether. I am soon to be married myself, and the only thing I lack is the rare romantic aura of the Indian moon. Each moment is a honeymoon, the night is tremulous with romance, 'twould make a hard-boiled traffic cop romantic! Well, I haven't got the fare, so my dear love and I must have two honeymoons, one now hiking along the Hudson, and one some years later, just after the monsoon, under the spell of the Indian moon, in Cambay.

I set off for Bombay that very evening, sped by the newlyweds from the bridge.

Happy ones, I could see them hand in hand, in the light of the chart room where they had gone to see the last of my convoy. That lady was not called "Uma" for nothing. "Uma," the "Illuminated One."

But the light was behind her; her countenance was dark, already.

## CHAPTER XV

### NEGOTIATIONS FOR OIL

It was perfectly obvious, of course, that I must be the one to go to Bombay for the oil. A moment's reflection was enough to convince me that Casmyth could not undertake that work. He was far too well known there, for one thing, as a sailor who had long used those seas. Also he was the precious new husband, and then there was the discipline of the ship.

I was fairly well known in Bombay, but the place is as big as New York, and just as easy to lose yourself in, if you are not a character like Casmyth. When I say as big as New York I don't mean those parts that extend to Newark on the west and Floral Park on the east, or Coney to Yonkers with the Bronx thrown in and White Plains beyond. Nor do I mean Manhattan alone, but something reasonably in between. Bombay is fully as big as that, so it is easy to see how an indistinguishable person like myself might pass almost unnoticed through its streets for days quite safely.

Civil sahibs are the most inconspicuous people in India, sartorially I mean, where Indian men's dress is still the richest stuff and rarest workmanship that money can buy. The uniformity of civilian dress is axiomatic. Neat pith helmet, silk suit, pipe-clayed shoes or samburdeer brogues. The dhurzi on the *Ranee* had made some fairly decent silk suits for me some time back, so I packed a few in a bag, for use in Bombay. Normally, on board I lived in khaki shorts and a silk shirt; those

comic little shorts well above the knee make all the difference between heaven and hell in that climate.

Those shorts give one a curious feeling of jaunty Charlie Chaplin irresponsibility, and the look of it, too. But you don't notice it in India after the first novelty has worn off. Strange that I should see an advertisement the other day of just such a costume (meant to be exceedingly funny, and slightly obscene)—in a Fifth Avenue tailor's window, labeled:

"If fashion should come to this!"

The point being the exposed suspenders below his B.V.D.'s, on the socks of the Adonis of the Avenue. That advertisement may be seen in life in any Indian city, any day, in every comic detail. Sportsman, complete with cane, gloves, starched collar, waisted lounge-coat, fancy vest, shorts *and* the bright-red sock suspenders! Sahibs in their moments of ease do not go quite as far as the exposed suspenders, they wear stockings up to the knee, uniformly, so that they may look exactly like each other; that is even more uniform than their silk business suits. You can scarcely tell one from the other at twenty yards, with the helmet well down over the eyes. I knew I should have little difficulty in that direction; still, I wanted to know who was in Bombay, from Calcutta.

I am a Calcutta man, and my business is practically without interest to the Bombay wallah, also rather beneath his notice. I was merely a jute wallah in the mighty "city of cotton," so I could snoop around unnoticed and have evasions ready if I ran into a friend by accident.

Casmyth couldn't have done that, he would have got a dose of his own detestable back-slapping from Church Gate Street to Apollo Bunder before he had

been half an hour in the place. That is the chief reason why I took on the job of getting the oil myself.

We were to meet at the rendezvous off Devibunder, near our last anchorage, you remember, as soon as I got the oil. Finally I took the Goanese with me, to deal with him as circumstances permitted. He broke down as soon as we were out of sight of the *Ranee* lights, poor devil; I had no intention of rubbing it into that wretched man. If I could do it safely I meant to find him a job, for a month or two, to get him out of the way and, if you like, to palliate his heartache. I understand heartache in another, and in myself, too.

Letting the Goanese loose looked like setting a spy on our trail, but time was all I needed. I meant to get the *Ranee* out of commission in a month by hook or by crook. I needn't have bothered my head about it. She was at the bottom of the Red Sea before that, sunk by our own hands, too.

It was slow trip down to Bombay, for I had to tow the felucca and she towed badly, although she was dismantled and gutted of everything we could shift in a couple of hours. Also I had to save every drop of oil I could on the way down if I was not to encroach on the *Ranee's* emergency rations, the only thing that would enable her to keep the rendezvous at Devibunder. Even as it was, there would be some danger of burning out some of the engines unless Casmyth and the chief could rake up something in Baroda, or Ahmedabad, to eke out their scanty supplies. As a matter of fact, Casmyth did tear himself away from his lovely bride for a day, and found some oil of a sort, half-way to Baroda. He nearly got into serious trouble, the Irish hot-head, by paying too much for it. Anxious to avoid the hours of haggling that Indians love as much as a deal itself, he tried to defraud the dealer of the only exercise such Indians ever indulge in. Exercise is

right, as you would say if you saw a small deal being put through by two merchants. The noise and the excitement is stimulating to a degree, to everybody for miles around. Those Indian merchants are extraordinarily quick at figures, mental arithmetic of a sort, performed or checked on the joints of the fingers, like a human slide-rule. If two merchants or buyers are cooperating in a deal, one never speaks to the other, he needs all his breath for his adversary. Swiftly seizing his friend's hand and slipping both under his cloak, or a fold of his dhota (a voluminously draped loin-cloth) he will communicate to his friend the result of his calculations, on the joints of the hidden hand. The friend will check the calculation, and even propose an amended bid, and when they have both reached a decision, they will snatch their hands free, and dash into the commercial battle with lusty vigor. All this calculation is done with lightening-like rapidity, under the folds of the dhota, as I have said, and a Westerner is dumfounded at the united front the Indians present without having apparently spoken a word.

The only course open to a Westerner is to name frankly the rock-bottom price he intends to pay, having arrived at it previously after careful reflection. He can never hope to get the better of Indians in their own methods of bargaining. The course I have indicated is better than getting the Indian to name *his* price (the usual Western way of going about a deal, i.e. to make your opponent commit himself)—for one never dreams of paying more than half or a third of what an Indian asks, and then you are back at the old Indian everlasting game of "beating down," by slow stages. It is easy to say these things, I know, and very difficult to do them. No one should go into a business deal with Indians without an exact knowledge of the value of the articles involved. If you cannot spend the time, or

get the experience to do this, keep out of business altogether in India. No Westerner stands a ghost of a chance at the Indian game. "They be a crafty folk; worse than Jews," the merchants, as Hakluyt said in the sixteenth century, and they have not changed one jot since then, and never will. That is the charm of India, it never changes, not in the slightest particular, not so much as one hair's-breadth of its customs or manners or habits, in thousands of years.

Well, Casmyth knew how to deal with Indian merchants. He had named his price and stuck to it. But unfortunately that price was well over 100 per cent more than the local value of the oil. Casmyth, you understand, was dying to rush back to his lovely bride, who had languished for nearly half a day out of the sight of her lord. Terrible! Intolerable! Anguish unspeakable!

Of course the merchant stormed and raved and swore that Casmyth's offer was like unto the starving of widows and orphans, shameless open-daylight robbery of an honest trader, who could not resist the great authority invested by the Inscrutable in all Sahibs. Tears, whines, wheedles, all for the purpose of getting a few more *pice* (less than farthings) on a price that was already over 100 per cent more than he had ever expected.

I gather that Casmyth banged his money down then and demanded the oil and no more words—or he would go elsewhere.

That was bluff, of course, there *was* nowhere else to go.

The sight of the money, the full amount, without *hoondies* or other drawbacks, was too much for the merchant. He lost his head and said he had changed his mind. He had decided not to sell at all.

That was bluff, just like my friend's, only a more

skilful brand. He backed up his bluff with a suddenly remembered promise to a local rajah to supply him first.

Mind, the merchant never agreed to accept Casmyth's price, ridiculously generous though it was. He knew there was always a chance that my friend might weaken. Besides, natives will sometimes fly off the handle like that if you don't treat them in the way they are used to, about bargaining, I mean. It is impossible for me to say what was the ruling factor in this case. I was not there.

Then Casmyth got angry, as sahibs will, with languishing brides awaiting them.

He swore he would take the oil by force, and be damned to the merchant for a shuffling, scrimshanking, backing and filling, tea-tinted son of a scrounger! The price *was* generous, you know.

A big crowd had collected by this time, as usual, mostly on the merchant's side. Things began to look pretty ugly for my friend, and he suddenly remembered our situation as contrabandists, and realized what a fool he had made of himself. If the thing turned into a fight there would be police inquiries and then nothing to do but cut and run to the *Ranee* with the police on our track, for good. And the *Ranee* couldn't run anywhere, she could just make the rendezvous, with very careful half-speed steaming.

He had bungled the whole business properly.

The merchant bolted into his office at the first sign of British pugnacity, or Irish bellicosity, if you prefer it. The office door was locked and bolted and barricaded, and Casmyth turned from it to face the angry mob.

A mob in India will have a victim, once roused.

There was nothing for it but to push through the seething crowd, to reach his "ekka" or pony carriage,

and try to drive away as quickly as possible before the police took an interest in him.

Well, Casmyth says the mob was getting uglier every minute—Baroda is practically a free state, with very little control exercised by the British Government, and the Barodi therefore have very little awe or respect for Westerners of any kind. *Lathis* were beginning to flourish (long bamboo sticks with heavy iron tips), a few knives glinted, and I dare say a sword or two.

And the ekka was gone!

The driver had got aboard at the first sign of serious trouble and bolted with the two servants Casmyth had brought ashore.

A jolly old mess-up, what!

There can be no running away in such cases, for sahibs. Push steadily toward the outskirts of the mob, and try not to think of the knife that may be thrust into your back at any moment.

You must walk, slowly, too, even after you get clear.

A quick step is a false step, and may cost you your life.

I have seen the bodies of white men beaten to pulp—however, my friend walked slowly through the mob toward the road. He had some pleasant thoughts, he told me afterwards, especially about his bride, and myself, half-way down the Cambay Coast, and his own pig-headed folly in not recognizing the special nature of his mission, and the silly boggling at a little long-winded diplomacy with the Indian merchant. He was getting near the outskirts of the mob by this, you must remember, and knew that the worst part of the work was yet to come. Suddenly the mob melted as if by magic, the road cleared, and he discovered a small fleet of Rolls-Royce cars ahead, resplendent with gold-leaf and flying banners. My friend stood boldly in the

middle of the road and the first car pulled up at his side.

A young Indian gentleman got out, arrayed in gorgeous brocaded silks, and glittering with priceless jewels.

It was a local princeling, rajahkin, this *deus ex machina*.

That oil was produced, and transport for it also, before you could say knife. When the question of the price was raised, the wily old merchant said he would prefer to make a gift of it to any friend of the "Chota Rajah" (little prince).

"But what price did you ask of this sahib?"

Long-winded story leading nowhere, stopped abruptly.

"What price?"

Then the murder was out!

"Give him half," said the prince.

This was done.

And my friend went on his way, rejoicing.

The servants were found along the road a few miles, green with terror; they were soundly rated for their cowardice, but I don't know, I would have done exactly the same in their place, I think.

## CHAPTER XVI

### BOMBAY AND BAD NEWS

As you know, I was slowly making my way down the Cambay coast all the time the oil controversy was raging. I had only to keep clear of the land, and that was only difficult at night, and not excessively so then.

I did a good deal of thinking about that Goanese blackguard during that trip. I often wonder if I wasted the bowels of my compassion on him.

It is quite possible that he put the naval authorities on our track; somebody did, you know. I am quite certain that none of my business friends in Calcutta knew of my connection with the *Ranee*, and there was no one in Bombay who could do it. That supercilious naval friend I met in the Yacht Club never suspected a thing, I'll swear. Yet how can you account for the sudden appearance of that antiquated old cruiser in the offing, just as we pulled our anchors out of the mud at Devibunder?

I can't think the Goanese did it; he was a discredited man first and last in Bombay, even his own people spat at the sight of him. He was too hopeless to be of use even as cat's-paw for the oil. The oil merchants would have kicked him off their doorsteps before he opened his mouth. How could such a man approach the high and mighty Government Officials, or even get a letter to them that would not be thrown into the waste-paper basket with scarcely a remark. Every Official in India receives scurrilous letters continually about anything

and everything in British India. Such letters are rarely read beyond the first line, unless they are funny, and then they go the round of the clubs. By funny, I mean unconsciously funny, roadside scribes, malapropisms, and so on.

Perhaps the solution of the whole matter is that the authorities knew we were up the Cambay Gulf all the time, and fearing we might have a runlet ashore there, preferred to let us come out into the open in our own time. That seems to me like the brainy part of the British Navy, the small section that works so quietly behind the noisy haw! haw! of supercilious idiots like my friend.

However it was, I got into Bombay Harbor without interference of any kind; just before it got dark on the third evening after leaving the *Ranee*, I sighted the pall of smoke that hangs perpetually over Bombay. That was fortunately timed. I gave Back Bay and Kolaba and the forts in the harbor a wide berth and stood over to Elephanta, with the lights of Warli as my guide.

Elephanta is an island on the eastern side of that magnificent estuary, several miles across the water from Bombay City. It is like Gibraltar on a small scale, but clothed with beautiful verdure just after the monsoon, the time of my present approach to it. Like Gibraltar, Elephanta is honeycombed with man-hewn caves, but not for gun-casements. The inner chambers form the most amazing series of temples, all carved, all be-friezed, be-pillared, porticoed and be-shrined, and listen to this! with an unmistakable Grecian refinement of technique and appreciation of form. Line! You talk about line, and the purity of the profiles on the Pan-Athenaic Frieze!

Go to!

I tell you those lovely forms in the innermost re-

cesses of Elephanta's petrified groves were not designed by human hand or brain.

They sprang perfect from the adjacent waves, like Venus, and wandering ashore, in the cool of the sacred groves, and sporting a little too noisily, to the detriment of perfect order, were transfixed by Vishnu to the Temple walls.

Vishnu preserveth Order.

In All Things, in All Places, at All Times.

Ask any Indian gentleman, if you don't believe me.

Fantastic, you say! Tell me, have you ever seen the living gold nuggets of Elephanta? No! Well, I have, frozen on a crystal bed, a perfect oval plaque; here, before your eyes, close them,—gone!

When you have seen that, you will believe anything.

Fairy gold. Finer than any minted gold.

You can fill your pockets with it at Elephanta any day you care to go there. But don't try to grab it all, or it will turn to dust.

Treasure! I wouldn't open an eye to look at a mountain of it!

I nearly lost both my eyes looking at just such heaps of rubbish.

But that belongs to the end of this narrative.

By night Elephanta is completely deserted, and I knew it would be easy to find a suitable mooring for the felucca, and the launch. I soon towed the empty felucca with the *Ranee's* launch, and, when I had fixed up both crew and boat, I gave the crew instructions to burn three matches at the approach of any craft, two quickly and one slowly, with certain passes, and to let no one aboard who did not reply in similar form.

I then turned the launch toward the lights of Bombay. The swarms of bunda boats and country wallahs along the water-side above Bombay provided a perfect hiding-place for the launch, and a few annas pence in-

sured complete immunity from molestation till I cared to return.

Spare not the small fees of courtesy in Hind.

They are numerous, but value is always obtained.

The first thing I did on shore was to buy a large quilted topee, of the sort that second and third-class sahibs affect, and a white drill outfit such as railway linesmen wear in India. Then I made my way to Grant Road Junction, bag in hand, to wait for the Calcutta mail. All trains stop at Grant Road, even the Calcutta Mail. She was nearly on time, so I had not long to wait. I gave a conductor two rupees to let me on the train, say seventy cents; enough, more would have "put me in dutch" with the Eurasian conductor. If two weren't effectual then it could not be done at all.

A careful, but overtly casual inspection of the whole train, from the corridor, assured me that none of the passengers aboard were friends of mine from Calcutta. My luck was in. The next thing was to find out who was on duty at Kolaba terminal. My luck held. I got all the information I wanted from the conductor who let me on the train at Grant Road. I knew the man at Kolaba quite well enough to justify a passing "cheerio!" That would establish my entry into Bombay as a bona fide passenger, from Calcutta by the Mail.

Then we steamed in through Chowpatti, around the Back Bay, which is more lovely at night than the Bay of Naples.

All was going as smoothly as a hot knife through butter. No tickets are collected beyond Grant Road, you know.

A quick change into a silk suit in a station lavatory, and I was ready to join the rest of the Mail passengers, also in fresh silk suits, now beginning to get their gear into taxis at the station exit.

My railway friend was on duty in his office, and

I "pulled my gay-and-hearty greeting stunt" on him without a hitch. That official would spread the report of my arrival by the Mail exactly as I wished him to. My presence in Bombay was explicit henceforth.

It may seem like a lot of trouble for nothing to you, here in free America, all that quick-change business. But anyone with a knowledge of the C.I.D. (Criminal Investigation Department) in India will assure you it was absolutely essential.

The C.I.D. knows everything that is knowable in India.

They have to, or the British couldn't hold India for a week. The slightest deviation from normality, and they pounce down on you like hawks on poultry. No penalties, or threats; that is not their work; something far more important than police-court cases is their end.

Just explanation of the deviation from normality; if you tell the truth, that is the end, their end—the truth. If they know the motive for your comic behavior, they won't trouble you, you can deviate to blazes if you like. The police, or the Revenue, or the military will get you if they want you, later.

So I had to slip between the C.I.D. and the Night Mail, out of one personality into another, to get myself inconspicuously on to the side of India to which I did not belong, according to C.I.D. standards.

I know I have said that civil sahibs are all inconspicuous, but that only refers to a distinction made with other sahibs; my best means of hiding from the C.I.D. was to keep with my own kind, an inconspicuous atom amongst atoms against a plain background, of 320,000,000 Indians.

The taxi service in Bombay is perhaps the best in the world, though there is no uniformity there. You may get a Rolls Royce or a Ford, for the same price,

too. That automatically keeps up a high standard of efficiency.

Nobody is going to ride in a Ford when there is a Rolls next on the rank. My driver took me along the water-front to avoid the congestion around the Taj Mahal Hotel, and as I passed the Yacht Club I longed to go in and meet people of my own caste, but I had no dinner garment, so I had to go elsewhere.

I had an excellent meal at the Bombay Club, and of course much good talk of jute prospects and general business. Oh !the sweet savor of it! I tell you the world is a lonely place for smugglers, for deviators from the orderly life of business men, approved of Vishnu.

I slipped back into that hard-drinking, hard-working set like a cog in a well-worn piece of machinery. A pleasant evening.

Someone suggested a theater party after dinner, about ten o'clock, mark you! I excused myself on the ground of fatigue from my recent long train journey across India. I had a lot to do that evening. First to get in touch with Viroschand's Bombay agents and find out how he stood, and whether any news of the fate of the *Shah Jehan* had reached him. The agent was not at home when I called at his house and would not be back till next day, so I left a note to say I would call at his office in the morning.

Then I had to get on the track of our oil.

The old serang of the *Shah Jehan* was to meet me by appointment at Chowpatti on the following evening, so I made all the inquiries I could and finally got on to the oil we needed. It is necessary to state that I did not transact any definite business that night. I only made appointments for the following day. All business ceases in Bombay at 6:00 p. m. as completely as in New York.

I was tired out when I got back to the club, and I went straight to bed.

Next morning my troubles started in earnest.

The oil was available, which was singular for Bombay, but there was no transport. I could not go to Europeans for motor lorries, that would be giving the whole show away, and for the life of me, I could not get the necessary bullock carts. I went from place to place, in taxis, by trains and trams, and on foot, but the dozen carts I required could not be got for love or money. It happens so occasionally in India, you slip up just where you are most certain there is no danger. The bullock carts are largely the private property of the drivers, his invested capital and his means of livelihood. He hires himself out as he pleases, when and where; there is no systematic arrangement of such people possible. Big contractors have their own stables, of course, but I could not approach them for such a delicate piece of business.

At last I had to be content with seven poor bullock carts and to take the risk of advertising myself by making two journeys along the same road about the same time.

I met the serang as arranged at Chowpatti, near the railway-crossing at the end of Church Gate Street, and told him to get some small bunda boats (like large canoes) for the next night, up the Warli River, at sundown. He was to wait at a certain place for me till I arrived with the bullock carts, even if I did not come till dawn. When all was loaded in the boats, I meant to tow them across to Elephanta by the launch.

All was in readiness now for the following night's work, so I went back to the club and I was glad to spend a quiet hour or so reading the papers, especially back numbers concerning Viroschand's affairs, and then

I tumbled into bed, weary but contented with my labors of the day. It is no joke hustling yourself in that climate. You need a couple of servants to write a simple business letter. You are a fool if you try to do it without.

Next morning I was at Viroschand's agent's a little beforehand to my appointment, about 9:45. It seems late to Westerners, starting work at 10:00, and many business houses don't start till 10:30. But the Indian employee has a lot to do before arriving at his place of business.

Pujah of all sorts, and the better castes, have elaborate morning caste rites, and ceremonial bathings to perform. Many will not eat food of any kind out of their own houses, and it must be prepared by the proper person in the properly appointed way. This means that such people are without food till sundown. That must be exhausting to a degree in such a climate as Calcutta or Bombay or any Indian town in the plains. But what of that! It is the ancient established order and all things must bow to it.

A really high-caste man will not eat unless the place in which he eats is properly swept beforehand, and he himself will wash from head to foot before touching a mouthful. Some of the highest castes will not eat if any stranger or strange thing approaches the place; any risk of pollution means a complete sweeping, and washing, and resetting of the meal.

This leads to ideas of cleanliness which makes Westerners seem dirty pigs by comparison.

Even a low-caste Indian will turn his back on you if you begin to eat a sandwich in his presence. You wonder why, where he "gets that bashful stuff from." Now you know.

Such are the beneficial effects of a profound respect for tradition. It has its defects.

You will understand I am only skimming the surface of Indian social customs and usages. To deal adequately with that subject would require a dozen large volumes, and they would be fascinating beyond belief to Americans.

They would see the converse of their own dear land; exactly, and perhaps, who knows? see their land a little clearer than they do at present. I have traveled round the world, and there is nothing so well worth a man's study or that grips his attention so completely, as the study of customs of civilizations, ancient ones particularly, for modern ones are usually so devoid of special character that they lack interest: a hotch-potch of hybrid usages, not understood by the people who perform them—performed mechanically—not even appreciated, nor ever examined for their source of origin and derivation. What of that? This, for instance.

I believe that it is possible for many of the next generation in New York to become ignorant of the reason why they cease work on Sunday.

Probably no one then will work on Saturday either, judging by the excellent way things are going, and both days will be merely workless days, "holidays," not Holy Days.

What of that? Just a moment.

It is conceivable that the *majority* of the immigrant population in New York (which is not typical of America, thank God!) will not know a *dozen* generations hence why they cease work on Sunday. The minority who do know will be so small they will have to be very careful how they express themselves on any matter at all. The majority is always right in America, or it will be so then, for there will be practically nothing but immigrants in the place.

So New York will have all the jollyday jam and

none of the powder, having so long ignored the reason for the original mixture.

Will she? I wonder?

The practical man will say, "What of it?" (They do, you know.)

"The chief thing for the people of a practical nation, is to have adequate periods of rest and recreation; what's all this fuss about names and derivations? If America has attained such a pitch of prosperity that she can afford such excellent institutions as two holidays a week, that is all that is required, isn't it?"

Fair Sir, patience a moment longer.

I doubt the permanency of such institutions, built on merely material foundations. A bad financial period of long duration would sweep the whole thing away, and then try to get a period of rest and recreation for the underlings, once it has been completely filched away from them! Human nature, especially the employing sort, is a poor thing, when it ceases to take its responsibilities seriously. The worst aspect of the whole thing would be the supineness of the victims. They would bow to the necessity of losing their holidays with scarcely a murmur, for put in terms of business efficiency there is a very strong fatalistic tendency in all Americans. Their strong common-sense way of ignoring derivations might lead them to a form of slavery as surely as an excess of respect for them has led India into slavery (of sorts) throughout the length and breadth of that vast continent.

You can have too little or too much of everything except moderation, as Casmyth says.

I have said that the Indian social system has its defects.

Those defects are more numerous and grave than one sees in America because India has been accumulating them and solidifying them for thousands of

years. I hesitate to say how many thousands. They seem defects to Americans because they are at the uttermost extreme from their own strong common sense. Pure nonsense, purified nonsense, in fact.

One wonders what the present fluid American vehicle of manners, customs and morals will be like at the end of a similar period of thousands of years, with a pronounced tendency to eviscerate all respect for derivations.

"You have got to!"

"Y'gotta!"

"Have you eaten?"

"Jeat?"

I say these things daily, myself. We all do, more or less.

So be it. Civilizations and derivations are a perpetual source of interest.

My old head clerk in Calcutta would not mount the private staircase to my office till a servant had dusted the handrail for him each morning. He was not a very high-caste man, but he knew that a very much lower-caste man had touched the rail early in the morning—the sweeper, who cleared the waste-paper basket. I might ring and 'phone, and storm and rave, but that handrail had to be wiped, perfunctorily, of course, but wiped, before he would come up. He was a fine man too, always on his job, faithful, loyal to the backbone, efficient, intelligent and quick—but—that handrail had to be cleansed before he would assist me in my affairs, no matter how critical they might be.

Amusing situations arise sometimes.

I remember one such occasion when my first wife was alive. We were living in a bungalow just outside Calcutta. It was the rainy season, fire-flies in clouds everywhere, and the air thick with beetles and other

insects. The dinner-table was covered with tiny insects, literally.

An enormous black horror, horned, winged, lepidopt-what-you-callum, flopped onto the dinner-table from the verandah, attracted by the bright table lights.

Mem-sahib ordered it to be removed, remover not specified.

The butler was standing at my back, his proper place; I screwed round in my chair and looked up at him.

He bowed. That's all.

I asked the stately old man to come round to my front, and then I ordered the beetle to be removed. He bowed again, with salaams. That's all.

Meanwhile the crawling pest roved noisily amongst the knives and forks and doilies.

It is a trying season, that clammy, steaming, early monsoon weather.

I exploded!

Had I to remove crawling pests from my own dinner-table?

Ultimatum to butler, with fist banging to emphasize my words and fortify my resolution.

The old man bowed again, then he retired for a moment and returned with a clean napkin and a lower-caste servant, viz., the hamal. Placing the napkin over the beastie, and holding down the corners, the hamal was instructed to pick up the heaving thing in the midst thereof; the hamal proceeded with napkin to the verandah, followed by the butler, and the loathsome insect was deposited, as directed by the butler, in the garden.

I had the good sense to see that the spirit of my orders had been carried out, and all went smoothly as before.

Similar situations arise in business every day. In that

*climate apoplexy will get you if you don't understand the origin of ancient usages.*

The beetle is an unclean thing, inhabiting foul places, and springing largely from carrion-fed larvæ.

*Verbum sapientem.*

While I waited for Viroschand's agent to come I was amused to see the clerks performing their "daily dozen" with the office stools—dashing them to the ground to moderate the bugs and fleas inhabiting the stools. It is good for the stool-makers, for the ceremony is performed with vigor and *élan*, each clerk as he arrived removing his coat, rolling up his sleeves and setting his teeth with grim determination. Doubtless, in a few hundred years the ceremony in India will have a proper office ritual, like the clashing of Roman spears on shields, in unison, as an acclamation of assent to the proposals of their leaders.

Faugh! filthy!

I tell you, you know nothing about it.

That agent's office was one of the most modern, up-to-date buildings in Bombay, scrupulously clean, too.

Why, I never opened a letter-file in my own office in Calcutta without first banging the book on the window-sill, pages flying wide.

As I believe I have already mentioned, there is a sect in India that will not place one foot in front of the other without first brushing the ground ahead with a small feather-broom.

*Thou shalt not kill.*

Kill what?

The agent was late, and when he arrived at last I was ready to plunge into the heart of my affairs, impatiently, sahib-like. I was afraid of losing my precious

bullock carts. I was dancing with impatience to get after that oil.

But I realized I should get nothing out of the agent if I started to hustle him. He might shut up like a clam.

So, with due preambles, salutations, skatings and skirting I approached the subject nearest to my heart.

I got a shake-up.

Viroschand was bankrupt, and the ship he lent us was mortgaged before we took it over.

The one thing Viroschand's enemies most desired: a bankrupt disposing of property surreptitiously, for he could not prove that there had been no sale. There was not a scrap of correspondence on either side.

The *Shah Jehan* had simply disappeared.

It was enough.

Viroschand was going through the Courts as fast as his enemies could drag him there.

And Casmyth, and myself!

We were all in deep water.

And powerless now to raise a finger to help our friend.

We had betrayed Viroschand.

I understood those visions now.

The agent said that Viroschand might still pull through, with the aid of the right kind of lawyers and the right kind of judge. I knew what that meant. It sickened me to the soul. But I realized the agent was right, and I should have to swallow my scruples.

The case was not likely to come on in the Law Courts for nine months or even more. Viroschand was justified in fighting for time. I had nothing to say against that. It was going to be a long hard fight, the agent said, malicious envy of our friend's past great triumphs was cropping up on every hand now that he had been caught tripping. No mud was too foul to be flung at him by

his enemies, the business opponents he had so often outwitted, out-maneuvered with his surprisingly simple tactics.

Even that absconding head clerk was thrown up as a convenient way of "covering" a nest-egg in the general crashing of Viroschand's affairs.

Our friend never was in actual need of money, even at the last. That would not have worried him a bit, though. Indians do not go to pieces like Westerners through lack of material comforts. Their spirits do not hover continually round their bank coffers. There was actually a small solid estate left intact when the vultures and jackals had been beaten off the body of his business that they had dragged to the ground between them. If I had been able to take that mangled business over I could have made a big fortune. But I never got the chance to do that.

I was in prison too long.

When I left the agent I was shaking like a malignant malaria case. What could I do for my friend, what had I time to do? The *Ranee* would be waiting at Devibunder for oil, all on board anxious to be gone from such a dangerous neighborhood. To keep them waiting there while I went to Viroschand's assistance in Calcutta was impossible. To calmly ignore Viroschand's trouble was impossible. To inform the *Ranee* of a possible compromise was utterly impossible; she could not move from Devibunder to another hiding-place to give me the time for such a thing. Why, to attempt to get in touch with the *Ranee* at all except by personal visit was suicidal!

Hopeless!

I was panic-stricken.

How difficult life can become after middle age. It is not fair. Just when the resiliency of youth becomes of the utmost value, it is gone. Up till thirty you *know*

you can keep calm about anything. After forty, you slowly become aware that life may be too much for you.

Young man! See to it that thy feet are firmly placed in the path of order approved of Vishnu, ere the seventh seven of thy years shall overtake thee!

I found myself sitting in the lounge at the top of the staircase in the Bombay Club, got there I know not how. I realized clearly then, for the first time, the sort of person I had become. I was a damned smuggling, drug-running pariah. I had no right to the comfort of this very chair I sat on. The men who used it, who toiled in the heat from year's end to year's end, honestly adding hard-won rupee to rupee, these would throw the chair into the street, and me after it, if they knew me for what I really was. They had their faults, those men; they were not angels by any means, but lies were lies to them, smuggling was smuggling, damned dirty, mean employment for dirty dogs like myself. And my table waters, the "Great Gulf Adventure," that was not much better, they would say. They would have no fancy names for that.

And they would have been right.

I bowed my head in shame.

Yet will it surprise you to learn that I returned to my friends on the *Ranee* and slipped back, in a measure, to that despicable employment, returning like the dog to his vomit? Well, I did, and I hope to make you see by a simple statement of the subsequent facts of this narrative that leaving the path of order after forty is one thing, and getting back to it another, and well-nigh impossible of achievement. One may resolve most sincerely to whip about and go henceforth in another direction—but what is the use if all other paths have been closed by your own acts? Jumping high barriers belongs to resilient youth. You pick yourself up on the

other side, badly bruised from a bad fall, perhaps, but you are out, and all the world is once again your path. Not so after middle age; you have no spring, and the fall on the far side of the barriers may destroy you. The thought of it will completely unman you, anyway. So you dreadingly look for possible gaps that you may perhaps enlarge sufficiently to crawl through, you hope and you temporize and you delay, and ten to one you never even use the gap when you find it.

Viroschand pulled all my barriers down.

But he pulled them on top of us all.

We were buried beneath the ruins, imprisoned for two years, Casmyth and I, and the day came when I could be thankful for that imprisonment.

Viroschand, old friend, that last task cost thee thy life!

What can a man do more, than lay down his life for his friend.

I am not Irish and I can contemplate the feeblest necessary compromise with gravity. I sent a long telegram to Viroschand, partly in our own business code, explaining as much as I dared of our present situation. How I regretted that cable, so long delayed in the Gulf of Oman. Who can justify his actions in a telegram that can only be half-explicit at the best. I hinted that the financial success of our "new enterprise" would be a chance of turning evil gains to good purpose, and so on, our all was at his disposal, and so forth. My ears burn at the thought of that telegram even now. How sad it must have made Viroschand when he got it!

When the wire was despatched I set about the disposal of the Goanese skipper. I was worried to death about the fellow. He was still on the felucca, or I hoped so. That was a harassing morning, looking up old sea-captains and shipping men generally, for of course

I dare not go near the port authorities. The record of that Goanese was as bad as it could be, with barratry at sea as the least of his crimes. The people of his own race whom I approached told me to drown him out of hand. I got enough facts to clap the fellow in jail if I wanted to. I took a risk on letting him loose; no one would give him a job, not if he would work for nothing; so I gave him a few hundred rupees and told him to go to the devil. He was glad to go. He did not even hint that we might meet at that mutual acquaintance before long.

The oil had to be transported somehow to the felucca, and anything might happen in that business; my nerve was shaken at the thought of it, and at the bottom of everything, shifting like a house on a sandy foundation I felt the crashing of Viroschand's affairs afar off. We could hardly hope to escape, under any circumstances, now that the *Shah Jehan* had become a factor of such importance in the débacle.

Well, I must try to keep calm and do the next thing to my hand, and that was transporting the oil.

At tea an idea struck me that promised to be of assistance to my friends on the *Ranee*. I had just received a reply from Viroschand, inspiring and brave, but there was a sting in the tail. He declined to accept any assistance until we had severed all connection with his sister.

That was even bluntly worded.

And my best friend was now her husband!

Well, if Viroschand would have none of me and my money, I could still help those two lovers. Is there any more useful or laudable employment in the world than helping lovers? It did me good to think of that. There was truth there. True love. It was the only truth in my life then of any comfort or solace. I could stand by those two, my friend and his wife, and they

were in deep water, needing all the help they could get.

Briefly, I proposed to look up an old naval acquaintance at the Yacht Club in Bombay, and get all the information I could about the *Ranee's* movements, from that end of the situation. It was dangerous work, and I was glad it was so. The thought of the danger incurred for others increased my self-respect. So I bought a dress suit, ready-made, and had it altered to fit, more or less. I meant to dine at the Yacht Club that night.

I got news in the club, at the very first cocktail (I was still at the old Bombay Club, you must understand, the business-men's club) while I was waiting for that "reach me down" dinner-jacket to be sent to me.

A chance acquaintance of the previous evening brought in a steamer-captain as his guest, and of course we foregathered in the lounge. The sailor had news of a series of opium smuggling transactions along the Gulf ports. The C.I.D. people were hot on the trail, he said, and had practically traced the source of supplies—(not stated, and too dangerous a subject for me to make inquiries about it)—and action in conjunction with the Customs authorities was probable in the near future. The thing was on such a big scale, the sailor said, that the naval people would also be called upon to co-operate.

Whew! that was news, indeed!

He was wrong about the C.I.D., of course, or partly so, but the rest was near enough, I dare say. I maintained an outward composure that only a total lack of interest in the whole subject could justify. I hope I did that, at least. And I watched like a lynx for a sign to indicate the measure of my success in my pose. It was all right. No direct questions were put to me, and the subject was changed shortly after. I made

my excuses and went to the Yacht Club with a rapidly beating heart. This was getting too warm altogether.

I meant to settle the matter anyhow that night, even if I had to ask direct questions. I did not have to ask those questions. The usual sprinkling of naval men were in the long bar when I arrived, and my acquaintance amongst them.

I did not even have to bring the subject round to opium or smuggling. They were all full of it. My acquaintance was superciliously communicative (he was the most utter snob, you know)—but he was still official enough to suppress names and places.

The cordon was closing round the *Ranee*, that was the sum of the matter. There could be no doubt that all our recent activities in the Gulf had been slowly pieced together. The description of the *Ranee* was unmistakable. My naval acquaintance got a shock later on when he did get alongside the *Ranee* and found I was a passenger on board. He will remember his loose talk in the Yacht Club bar till his dying day, I fancy.

Poor lovers! And what situation was I soon likely to be in myself! That supercilious naval officer was absolutely cocksure of the imminent capture of the *Ranee*. His laconic references to the easy certainty of the thing now that the Navy was taking a hand irritated me. He seemed to think that the Navy had only to say "leave it to us," and everyone else could go to bed, assured that they would produce the *Ranee* out of the Indian Ocean as easily as a magnet picks out a steel needle from a packet of pins.

Well, the Navy had not caught us yet. She hadn't even ranged alongside, nor produced the proof of the *Ranee's* guilt. I warmed up to the subject, under the stimulus of that laconic long-nosed supercilious officer. I began to feel like showing the Royal British Navy

a trick or two. I would, begad! I had another cocktail, on the strength of my invigorating reflections. We all had one, and drank "damnation to smuggling Swedes."

That toast let me down badly.

I knew the reputation Sweden made for herself in the War and that was my reputation amongst decent men. I was a damned smuggling Swede allowed enough rope to hang myself, and of no more consideration than a sewer rat, when the proper length of rope had run out. They were right, you know. I had simply been abusing my prestige as a white man to make a lot of dirty easy money.

Damn them all! I'd show them yet—"here, boy! cocktail, *muncta*—what will you have, sailor?—gin and peach, right,—for everyone, boy!"

We had a number of cocktails together, and I was in a good mood when we went up to dinner.

An excellent dinner, it always is there, and the port was excellent, and everything and everybody were excellent, after dinner.

I had been too long from my fellows, from my caste, I decided, as I left the club for the round-up of the oil. Navy men were all right, you don't have to take such people too seriously. But what a life of penury, for a complete devotion to duty that is perhaps without parallel in the business world. Fine fellows at bottom, a little narrow, and supercilious, and contemptuous about the difficulties of commerce, that's all. Perhaps I *had* got mixed up in some funny business; you can't always choose your company in commercial spheres, not as you can in the Services, anyway. Well, it wasn't for long now. I had made my pile, and I would pull out, and steer clear of danger in the future, and stick to decent people and live in quiet comfort for the rest of my life—enjoy it while I had the health and strength to do so—that's the big

idea. I went into the bar as I passed and had another cocktail on the strength of it.

What's the use of killing yourself to live?

Cocktails! All cocktails!

Cock your tail up, with your head in the sand, and expose——

However, such were my thoughts as I waited for a taxi in the great open hall that looks on to the harbor, with the lights of the Admiral's flag-ship in the middle distance, and the great liners slipping out to the ocean, between that and Elephanta. All like a vast Venetian laguna, but no serenatas or gondolas, alas!

I changed at the Bombay Club and set off for my rendezvous at Warli. My bullock carts were waiting when I went for them and I collected the drums of oil without let or hindrance—the first load.

The serang was at the rendezvous with the bunda boats, and the oil was soon transferred to them. And then the second journey began. It was here I might expect trouble, so I decided to make a detour, round by Grand Road. In my white drill I looked the part of overseer, tallyman, what you will. I could have ridden on the bullock carts without remark, and I wish I had, now.

The second lot of oil I got at the go-downs only filled up five carts, so I paid off the spare drivers and let them go. Then we wended our way to Warli again, through the worst quarter of Bombay, via Grant Road rookeries, and a strange thing happened.

I was tired with all that walking by the side of the bullock carts, and I was satisfied the drivers knew the way now and they seemed decent, honest fellows. It was a risk, but I decided to take a taxi, get my bags, and go on ahead, stopping at various points along the road till my carts came up with me. I had walked enough, and that neighborhood is unsavory to a degree.

Even dangerous to "topee wallahs" (a term applied to poor whites or half-castes who affect the dress and helmets of sahibs). I had better try to describe that district, though in truth it beggars description.

It is the most appalling resort of public prostitution in the world, I am told. Calcutta is no worse. Can one say more?

Street after street of foul dens, with iron-barred fronts, like the cages of wild beasts, all lit by flaring gas-jets and gaudy lanterns. Truly, wild beasts are in those cages. Horribly painted women and girls, offering themselves for sale in prostitution, shrieking foul and obscene offers to the seething mass of drunken and drug-maddened men in the narrow street, snatching at their clothing and dragging them into the foul dens of filth and venereal disease.

Bedlam and all iniquity let loose!

I will not describe the matter in more detail, it is too awful for belief. Yet it persists, to some degree in many of the towns of India.

To abolish the thing is impossible, to disperse it would be worse than the existing state of horror, for at least it is now in circumscribed areas, and can be pinned down there, with all its evil associations.

I had to pass across the corner of this pulsing cancer on the human social system, and my driver ran over some wretched creature thrown from a kennel into the gutter, stripped, robbed and drugged to insensibility. No remarkable thing. The streets are lined with such victims of their own bestiality.

Unfortunately the poor wretch in question was not sufficiently insensible to keep still as the car went over his leg, and he got a bad blow from the edge of the front mud-guard.

A crowd collected at once, of course, a beastly mob.

I stopped the car, jumped out, and fought my way

through the mob, already beginning to howl, picked up the man and put him in the back of my car.

The mob piled into the car too. I thought all was over. The driver fled. How I cursed him for a coward, —wrongly.

I was scrabbling under the seats of the car for a weapon, intending to sell my life as dearly as possible when the voice of a virago howled above the rest of the bedlam, and some poor courtesan, who had seen the whole thing from an upper balcony (all the houses have balconies filled with poor girls for sale)—dashed into the fray with an old tennis-racket in her hand.

Even then I wondered how such a thing could be in that place.

She beat my assailants off, laying about her with filthy curses and threats, and at last I found a tire pump under a seat and started in to help. It could only be a question of moments before we were both knifed.

But a fight at the last is good.

And then that driver, returning with some police at the double, blowing whistles and smashing at heads with truncheons, and kicking and fighting, got to the car at last.

“No time to lose, Sahib! Start car quick!”

I climbed over to the driving-seat and thanked God when the self-starter shrieked that it was not run down, as is usual in India.

We moved very slowly at first, the policemen out on the wings, lashing out with might and main at every face within reach. Slowly we got a little way on, no one else was run over, then round a convenient corner, followed by the shrieking mob; swiftly gathering speed, we soon outdistanced pursuit.

But there remained three very serious factors still to be dealt with: the wounded man, the courtesan, and the policemen.

The last two were friends, however, and the third I hoped to make so. For obvious reasons, I could not take the wounded man to the police station as I ought to have done, nor for the same reasons could I take him to a public hospital, yet there was no way out of it; I *had* to take him to some hospital.

At a safe distance from that awful scene I stopped the car.

I said I proposed to take charge of the wounded man, take him to a hospital and set him up for life, with a few hundred rupees. My friends said that was absolutely unnecessary, throw him out into the first field or garden.

This is truth, the brutal truth.

The man was only a coolie!

I insisted.

Then, said the policemen, you will have to come to the station to clear *us* if you do. The woman declined to be involved in such a matter, and rated me for a selfish idiot without regard for the friends who had saved my life. The upshot of the matter was that I compromised on the coolie. The woman was to get a "gharry" (horse-carriage) and take charge of the man, for twenty rupees. The policemen got ten rupees each, though the woman said that was too much. She had suggested her own charge of twenty, and declined more. I gave the woman fifty rupees for the wounded man, and I hope he got it. When we examined his wounds, in the light of a head-lamp from the car, he was not so bad as I had thought, a long shallow scratch, that is all, and his leg was only grazed. No bones broken.

So all was arranged in that manner.

All were satisfied, and the policemen promised to send the woman a gharri as they returned to duty in that cesspool of iniquity.

I never saw the woman again, and I never wish to.

But she saved my life and I bear her in reverent and tender memory for it. Why should such a person be so incredibly brave?

Because there is an angel in every woman, even the worst, if you have the good fortune to call it forth.

It may be hidden under innumerable vices and defects of character. But it is there, always.

When a man goes to the bad, he rots to the very core. Not so a woman. God help us all to remember this, that we may be considerate of all women, tender, if possible and seemly, cherishing them for the heart of gold within them that is never utterly burnt to dross.

I found my caravan ahead of me at Warli and the last of the oil was transferred to the boats, the taxi man suitably rewarded, and the rest of the drivers paid off. Then I set off for the launch. It is hardly necessary to say that the crew had decamped for just those horrible dens I had escaped from that night, I dare say. I got the launch under way with the help of the old serang, and told him he must collect the crew as best he could, and wait for me at sunset the next evening in that spot. He was to be there in any case, with or without crew.

Then I towed the bunda boats to Elephanta.

It was a long slow business, single-handed. Fortunately I learnt the course pretty well, going back and forth for the Goanese. Anyhow, it had to be done somehow, and most things like that get done, somehow.

I nearly went astray in the dark, several times, as I had all my guiding lights at my back and the launch to steer and the motor to tend, as well. Once I got a fright, just opposite dock No. 7, I think it was. I was creeping slowly coastwise down the Bombay side, you must remember, to the point where I could strike straight across the harbor. The shore lights twinkled

among the forest of masts on my port side (left hand, you know), casting long bright spears and waving pennants down the black water toward me, the reflections of the great dock-lights nearly reaching me sometimes. It was one such great pennant I was trying to pick up with a high town-light behind it, so I had no eyes for the waters of the great estuary to port, empty except for the lights of a few anchored tramps, waiting for sailing orders and so forth, though one of them seemed rather curiously close inshore. Suddenly it struck me as I glanced at this nearby tramp that her masthead light was terrifically high,—and—God Almighty!—she wasn't anchored!

It was the B.I. Mail going into dock!

I was right across her path!

With a long string of unlighted boats!

There was only one thing to do, and that was,—step on it! as the vivid vernacular here has it. Only a sailor can begin to understand what those heavy unwieldy canoes started to do then, or explain the deceptive nature of the lights in the night, to me, away down in the black waters below that mighty vessel.

The Mail had shut off her engines as soon as she was opposite her dock bearings, I suppose, and was forging silently through the night with all the vast power such a ship has, once under way. The Mail missed my last canoe by—what? Feet? Inches? One thinks of that even at such moments.

High, and away up in the night, a voice, like the voice that shall call us all, from the last of all nights:

“What the . . . !!!”

That is all.

I hear that great golden trumpet roar still. I had no lights, neither below nor aloft.

There is no fouler crime on earth.

On earth!

Let us talk of serious matters.

At sea?

At last I found the felucca and shipped the oil. The owners of the bunda boats (or canoes) got a free tow home for several miles, and then I cast them off and went back to the felucca. I turned in all standing after giving the crew instructions to waken me at dawn. I slept like the dead, on a mat amongst the oil drums, with one of them for a pillow, and at daybreak roused, and shifted our moorings to another anchorage several miles away in a secluded creek. I did not want those bunda-boat men to find me again. And then came another long "caulk below."

In the evening I crossed over in the launch to the Bombay side, found the old serang with all our crew safely collected, looking very sheepish and bedraggled, and soon we were all aboard the felucca.

Then commenced that long dangerous journey in the night to Devibunder, towing the felucca loaded with oil. If any weather at all had got up I should have had to cast her off and let her drive. But none came. I found the happy couple on the *Ranee* after two days and nights of incessant care and anxiety at sea. I was nearly a day behind our appointed time.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PURSUED BY A BRITISH CRUISER

Said Casmyth, on my arrival on board the *Ramee*:  
“Good Heavens, man, where have you been? We have been half crazy about you!”

Said Mrs. Casmyth,—ditto.

The newly-weds looked so radiant, so beautiful, so wonderful, I forgot all my good resolutions on the spot, or nearly so. These were not common people, not smugglers; it was a special case. Besides, there is none too much happiness in the world, of any sort. Let them be happy, if only for a little while. A fool's paradise is better than no paradise. I envied their simple ardor in being alive, in the same world with each other.

Time enough for news like mine.

Said I in reply:

“Good gentles both, prithee peace a space.

The beauty of this lady's face

Doth make me such a want-wit,

I have much ado to know myself.”

CASMYTH. “Bravo!” (Ripples of mirth from the bride.) “But, ‘peace a space’ is bad—oh, damnable!”

MYSELF. “Not at all, it is exquisite, a new form of spondee. I have just invented it, a cataleptic double spondee, if you want to know.”

CASMYTH. “I faint! Support me, good people all! A space! I faint apace, i'faith!”

MYSELF. "A period to this merry-Andrew work.  
 Such travel-stain I have as few may see  
 In days like these degenerate days.  
 A bath is my most need,—  
 What ho! within there, my bath, I say!

"But blank-verse apart, I have had the deuce and all of a time. We must get out of here, old man, at the double-pronto! Must tub, explain later, but get a move on, good sailor, as quickly as you know how."

"Sure, I'll get the anchors up as soon as the oil is safely aboard, and the launch and felucca swung in."

"Don't wait a moment, old man, swing 'em both in *now*, oil and all. See you later."

As I went to my stateroom a bravery of spirit came upon me, or as we loosely say, I shook off depression of spirit. Perhaps it was the effect of composing blank-verse (it is an extremely exhilarating occupation, even if it is imitation-Shakespeare)—and besides, the sight of the radiant lovers did a lot to cheer me up, as I say. How graceful is perfect wedded happiness!

As I shaved and tubbed, and trimmed myself up in decent comfort, with smiling servants to help me, and the security of a fine ship beneath my feet, I came to the conclusion that I would put off the Jonah man—at least for a little while yet. It would be a fine thing to keep those two charming people in blissful ignorance for a moon's length, a honeymoon's length, a brave thing, and I was man enough to encompass it.

I did just that thing.

I have never regretted it.

Hard on my brave resolutions, as distinguished from good ones, came the engine trouble that held us up for nearly three days almost within sight of Devibunder. If you glance at a map of that coast you will see that we had to make a circle, with a radius of nearly 200

miles, around Bombay, for safety on our way south. The Navy must have been quartering that arc during the whole of the three days I was towing the oil, which I think I may describe as "Hell on hot bricks" without fear of contradiction or being accused of making exaggerated statements.

I never said a word about my Bombay experiences the whole time the ship was turned into a floating smithy, by that stout-hearted Chinese chief engineer. He should have been in bed, you know, all those damnable days he was crawling along shaft tunnels, in a temperature of 120°, opening up the wound in his side.

Casmyth, stripped to the waist, grimed to the eyes, labored like ten men. His wife could scarcely keep her hands off him, she worshipped this new Vulcan of a husband as a god. But it was a warm living god that would come to her soft arms for the reward of his labors.

She was a happy woman.

As all women are intended to be happy.

You know what I mean.

Why should I blast such an illusion? So I never mentioned Bombay.

I was practically useless in such a nautical crisis, but I had to do something, to avoid insanity from my load of suppressed fear and the dread of impending calamity. I invented a job for myself, checking, arranging, sorting and dealing out stores and tools. So I got myself into an adequate state of grime and sweat; and bright eyes rested on me occasionally, for a moment. And I was the recipient of some tender confidences, poignant, unforgettable, a treasure in my after-life. Mrs. Casmyth got all my sympathy in her fear of strong drink. I have never been through that myself, I haven't enough temperament, but I have been near enough to know how to sympathize with a victim of that devil.

In the midst of our Vulcanic avatar, the long-sus-

pended sword of calamity stabbed down, ripping through my armor of spiritual hardihood, and knocking down the walls of Paradise, for the lovers.

The Cruiser was in sight!

I hoped it was not the Cruiser, straining my eyes in the direction of the plume of smoke, and yes—why should I be ashamed of it, praying it might not be the Cruiser, till it was, certainly, beyond all possible doubt. Then I snatched the glass away from Casmyth, who was standing by my side on the bridge. But I could see nothing. My eyes were dim with—what?—tears of disappointment. That is putting it mildly.

Casmyth, worn out with toil, three days' beard on his face, went gray with fear. And he was the bravest man I have ever met in my life. He looked along our decks, cluttered with benches, winches, sheer legs, cinders and dirt. Going to the rifle rack, he took out a piece and threw open the well oiled breach, then flung the rifle back, saying,

"Oh, hell! What's the use! It's all over!"

Had I to find courage for such a man?

Had I to plot and plan for such a heroic soul?

Could the mouse let the lion out once more?

I could try.

Desperately, feverishly thinking, I said to drooping Vulcan, sitting in the chart room, with his head in his hands:

"How long will it take to get the *Ranee* moving?"

"Ten hours, there's only fitting to do now."

"You're sure of that."

"Absolutely, ask the chief if you don't believe me."

"Where is the chief?"

"Down below, where I ought to be."

"Will he come to the 'phone if I call?"

"I doubt it, but you can try; he's on his back in the shaft tunnel."

I would try; so summoning all my powers of diplomacy, I first rang up the purser, who was the chief's only crony on the ship.

"Purser, get this message to the chief somehow—ask him just how long it will take to get the *Ranee* moving; if you can't induce the chief to come to the 'phone, bring the answer here yourself—say Captain Casmyth wants the information."

"Now," said I to Captain Casmyth (droop no more, Vulcan!), "I am going on board the Cruiser as soon as her mud-hook takes the ground."

"What! You're mad! Our only hope is to take to the boats!"

"No, there is one loophole—listen—I mean to keep them off the *Ranee* until you get her moving."

"Impossible, they will have the commander's gig in the water inside an hour."

"That is just what I mean to prevent—to try, anyhow—you have just time to get our anchor out of the mud before they notice it, not all the way up, half-way will do; let the cable hang down as if we were still at anchor, and see that we are kept head on to the tide with the force-pumps below the water-line at the stern-quarters. Then we shall slowly drift away from them with the tide. It is nearly flood tide now, and there will be practically no movement for an hour or more. It will be dark before they anchor, and we shall be indistinct before that. Remember, they draw a lot more water than we do, they will be chary of coming too close inshore for fear of grounding."

"By gad! it's worth trying, we can check our drift till dark, with the force-pumps; you ought to have been a sailor!" And now full of force again, he jumped down the bridge companion-way and raced to the engine room. Mrs. Casmyth got a flying salute as he passed her.

Then the purser rang up—

“Hullo! that you, purser?”

“Yes, sir; the chief says we can move in eight hours, if he doesn’t have to come bo— er, bothering about on the bridge.”

“Thank you; come up here, purser.”

When he arrived I gave him rough instructions about our movements. He was to keep the news of our naval friends’ arrival from the engine-room staff and he was to spread the news on deck that I was going on board the Cruiser to visit my friends. I repeated, and emphasized, the “friends”; there is no use starting an illusion if you don’t keep it up, even to yourself. Besides, they were actually friends, as yet. I went off in one of our small boats as soon as the Cruiser dropped her anchor. It was essential for me to be on board before they got a boat in the water. You can see that. Be bold, be ever bold, but—be not bowled over!

How describe my feelings as we pulled across that purple twilight sea, like the wine-deep sea of the Odyssey? The short period between sunset and dark is indescribably beautiful in those latitudes, flooding the whole world with such exquisite chromatic harmonies that it almost makes up for the harsh blinding color negations of the rest of the day. The white Cruiser looked like a dream-ship for beauty of form (she was an antiquated, clipper-bowed “piece” of the still lovable transitional period)—and for coloring, pale lilac, suspended against an amethystine tissue pulsing with threads of living gold.

The beauty of it took me by the throat, almost making me forget my fears and the desperate nature of my mission. Such detachment comes upon me sometimes, at the most critical periods of my affairs; it has served me well, and evilly. In the present case, it provided me with the necessary introductory

conversation with the officer of the watch on the Cruiser.

Can any sailor resist skilful flattery of his ship and her smart appearance? I trow not.

After mounting the ladder they let down for me (they took their time, but that suited me)—and saluting the quarter deck, I asked the officer of the watch if I could speak to the commander—so and so—handing out my card.

Bold! Cards at sea!

The officer looked me up and down, yawned in my face, handed the card to a sailor, and turned his back on me.

Perfect—I was to be ignored—for a long time.

I ordered my boat to sheer off a little, and wait. As long as I could keep their boat out of the water I was satisfied.

Then my naval acquaintance of the Yacht Club in Bombay came along. I could have hugged his long supercilious face to my breast. That is metaphor for the warm glow of impulsive feeling that comes with inspiration—I had one then.

“Ah,” said I, “how are you; well met, indeed,”—and seized his hand. In the gloom he did not know me.

“Eh! what! Who the devil are you?—Good God—it’s—it’s—Warburton!”

“The same.”

“But I don’t understand; are you from the shore, recently?”

“By no means; just come from that ship over there, cruising with an old friend, don’t you know; recognized your ship at once; you are a God-send to us; *do* you think your Burra Sahib would lend——”

“From that ship over there, did you say?”

“Certainly, friend of mine is skipper, retired sailor, took to the sea again in his old age” (Casmyth looked

old enough just before I left him, you remember)—“going down to Goa in ballast, from Basra, on a Parsee charter—offered me a trip by wire from Karachi.”

“You didn’t say anything about your trip to Goa in the Yacht Club.”

“Didn’t know anything about it then.”

“Humph!”

“But this small favor now, I’d appreciate your assistance,—*do* you think your Burra Sahib” (senior officer) “would lend us a chart to correct our soundings—our charts are positively pre-historic, you know—Parsee parsimony—ha! ha! what!”

“Humph!”

“I hate to trouble you, but my friend is full of fever, —buzzing head, and ears humming with quinine—you know—an hour with your charts would be a humane act.”

“Humph! does the commander know you are on board?”

“Oh, yes, I believe so, that is, I sent my card down to him a few moments ago” (half an hour more like).

“Your what!”

“My card.”

“Humph!”

“No hurry, I assure you, we have to wait for our stores, coming off tomorrow morning from Devibunder. We are moving in at the top of the flood to get them.”

“Humph! well—I’ll see.”

Off he stalked to the wardroom.

Far from friendly, offensively chilly, in fact, but he had served my turn, so I bore him no ill-will. He would distil the subtle lie into the ear of authority as soon as he was summoned from the wardroom, the news of our morning stores, that is. I know the type. He would pretend that he had wormed the informa-

tion out of me, with guileful traps of speech—efficient officer, bearing early information to headquarters.

I breathed freely for the first time since I reached the Cruiser. The officer of the watch still had his back to me, but it did not seem so ostentatiously withdrawn as before. He had seen the meeting with his wardroom mate. At least I was known to somebody in the world.

I took a turn past the back, quarter left, and slightest possible pause in my walk—

“Fine night, sir.”

“Humph.”

They were a lot of camels on board, but time was the essence of my contract, waste of it, that is; let them humph cameliously, I should worry.

I returned with composure to the attack as I passed the broad back after a few more turns.

“Beautiful lines this ship has forward.”

“Er, think so?”

“I do, indeed.”

Slight rise in the social temperature, mustn't press him, though. Several turns in silence, then—

“This ship was at so and so, I believe” (naming very gallant action of several years before).

“Ah, yes, I believe so.” (He was probably through it all.)

“Must have been a terrible affair.”

“All in the day's work.”

“I was there; I don't call that a day's work, hellish work, sir!”

“Really, were you there, how interesting; quite a picnic, what!”

“Picnic!—” (I nearly said “humph,” but it was too early) “—well, if that's your idea of a picnic!”

“Oh, you know what I mean, sailor's life, short and merry, you know.”

(Dare I? Yes, I would) "Humph," said I, not too loudly.

"What I mean to say, er, one is paid for that sort of thing, don't you know."

"Pretty poor pay, by all accounts, for such appalling risks; now, a business man——"

Here followed quite an interesting conversation, lasting fully half an hour, interrupted by my naval acquaintance, quite affable, too—"the owner would see me now."

To make a long, tedious, nerve-racking story short, I was virtually held a prisoner on the Cruiser, and pumped *hard*. Iron fist in the velvet glove, dinner in the wardroom, etc.

Just what I wanted.

There must have been some crisis in Anglo-Indian affairs of which I was totally ignorant, to make the "owner" so diplomatic. I never knew what that crisis was exactly, there is one nearly every month in India nowadays. But it was obvious to me that instructions had been issued to be very careful how they handled the *Ranee* at first. Just how delicate the situation was can be gathered from the fact that the Cruiser was sent at all. Royal Naval Cruisers (even antique ones) are not sent after smugglers, as a common practice, I can tell you. Awe and majesty were, evidently, to be the principal weapons of the authorities at first.

Their port was good, more than good, considering the difficulty of getting, and keeping, good wine in that climate. Of course there was some shrewd fencing, and some slashing cutlass work, when that failed to get past my guard.

"Your owner is a lady, you say,—on board?"

"Yes, a Parsee."

"Then why have you got Goanese papers?" (Slash number one!)

"Oh, the lady has only chartered the ship, I understand, for this voyage; the ship is out of Goa originally."

They *were* a lot of camels on that Cruiser, grunt, grunt, grunt.

"What did you say you were going down to Goa for?"

"Pardon, I didn't say, because I don't know anything about that, I am only a passenger, going as far as Goa."

"But surely you know what the *Ranee* is going to Goa for."

"Frankly, I don't; why not send over and ask the captain; he is in bed, poor fellow, but I am sure he will be delighted to see you."

He was, you know, but it was the engine-bed he was in. So it went on, and in the end they had to give me up, and they did it with a good grace; when I went back to the *Ranee* I had a pretty good load of liquor under my belt. It was necessary for me to drink; care in that respect was out of the question. I was to have the charts in the morning. They would be sent over, with a guard,—“valuable things, you know—er, you understand?”

I understood.

That guard was to search us, in the morning,—so that the quarry might not be frightened into any precipitate action in the night.

The net was spread.

I got a fright at the distance Casmyth had let the *Ranee* drift. I was glad to get on board to stop it. The Cruiser must be given an hour or two to settle down for the night. The *Ranee* was nearly ready to move when I got back, and my friend was all for a bolt straight off. I pointed out that the longer we waited the lower the Cruiser's fires would get. He saw that.

"How are the sportsmen over there?"

"Certain of our capture—tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, eh! Why not tonight?"

Then I told him of the stores we were supposed to be waiting for, at full flood tomorrow morning at eight o'clock. Then he started his awful back-slapping, and we laughed for five minutes together.

"I say, that was bright!"

"Someone has to be, in these cases."

"But do you think they will believe a yarn like that, from a passenger?"

"Absolutely! I haven't had charge of the stores on this ship for the last three days for nothing. I gave them chapter and verse. They thought I knew so much about the ship they believed I was lying in pleading ignorance of our cargo at Goa."

"You are a wizard."

"I act on an idea, when I get one—quickly."

That has been my method of doing business all my life, single-handed, and I know it pays. Thirty per cent of all our acts are foolish, no matter how you think them over. With a lot of colleagues it's different, that has to be a matter for discussion, for reflection, for delays; so many men are only too anxious to trip you up even when you are doing your best to be helpful to them. Committee work must be slow. When I have only myself to think of, I act on the first hint of an idea. Most men have ideas; half the men you meet in business are full of ideas, for expanding, for reorganizing, speeding up and so on, but they have not the drive to turn potential forces into kinetic ones. The other half of the business world has the drive and no ideas. The men who have both get what they want, if the breaks are in their favor at all.

And the whole thing is written.

But have you ever learned to read—what is written?

We waited till an hour before dawn, sluing round

with the tide as the Cruiser slued, and that was all in our favor. Our lights would now be confusing, as our stern was toward the people on board her. Then slowly, with only force-pumps below the water-line at first, we moved away. We had been tinkering with our mast-head lights for some time past, just to throw the Cruiser people off the scent of the first sign of our departure. And then, with all lights switched off, we quietly slipped away into the night. A heavy mist blowing in toward the rapidly cooling land helped us; we sailed straight into that, and without its aid I doubt if we should have succeeded so well.

When we had lost all the lights of the Cruiser I called a council of war below.

I had to tell the truth at last. Action-stations for every one henceforth; that was our only chance of permanent escape.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ON THE RUN

It is unnecessary to go into all the details of that council in the saloon of the Ranee. If ever you throw a Mills bomb into a lady's boudoir you will get some faint idea of the beastly mess such an action causes, particularly if the lady is there at the time and you are very fond of her. Mrs. Casmyth was softened by her marriage with her beloved lord beyond anything I could have imagined possible. At first she was prostrated by my news. Then she became twice as hard as she had ever been, with occasional periods of supine indifference, and rare periods of sweetness.

Once a tiger always a tiger, at heart.

Durga—Uma, is it not so? the Flashing Tigress; that was her name. From that time on she became, emotionally speaking, like a wild forest-creature, and as uncertain. Now she would be the gentle leaning beauty of a sheltered affectionate environment, now the flashing self-reliant adventuress of the old days when first we met her. A storm of passionate tears heralded the changes from one state of mind to the other. And all in all, she became a very difficult person to live with. When she was good she was very, very good, but when she was bad!—oh, dear!—let us change the subject!

One thing I must say, though, Casmyth liked her better than ever. I suppose that is what the Irish are really like, themselves, at heart. You remember Captain MacMorris in *Henry V*, to that civil-spoken little Welshman:

"I do not know you so good a man as myself: so Christ save me, I will cut off your head."

They are just the same now, flying out, and falling down, and praying, and weeping, and getting up and fighting like lions refreshed.

Well, we were on the run now, and fortunately the mist was thickening every minute. Our troubles were not over, by any means. The next trouble was the chief engineer. He had said nothing of his suffering through those days of fierce endeavor patching the disabled machinery, but now he could hold up no longer.

His wound had broken out, and bed was the only place for him for some time to come. Absolute rest was essential.

Casmyth was on his mettle at once, full of initiative and solicitude for the gallant comrade who had suffered and labored by his side. He offered to run the engine room alone if I could take over the bridge. That job was too big for me, and I had to say so at once. We compromised the matter, by fixing the chief in a bed near the main platform of the engine room, with Mrs. Casmyth as nurse; fans, screens, carpets, and flowers from the saloon conservatory. My friend divided his time between the bridge and the engine room, helping me above, and the chief below decks. The engineer reveled in it. He would like to be sick now, in that beloved engine room of his, I do believe. He could hear his great steel children happily at work, like young giants in harness; he had a charming nurse, and the ease of mind that comes to all honest men after great toil faithfully performed. He was in better case than his masters, far and away.

I don't think he cared to know anything about our trafficking or the Cruiser, or any of the ship's private business; he never asked any questions about them. His happiness lay in his duty. Happy man!

So we fled in the night through the mists of that Indian Ocean.

I don't think I ever had much faith in the plan of escape we concocted at our council of war. You can trick the British Navy for a while, but they are in no hurry, and they are like the grip of death for sureness of ultimate victory. I know the Navy had no illusions about our chance of permanent escape. They knew they could get us when they wanted us. Casmyth had little illusion about that either, any more than I had, but illusion was precious to him then, and I was willing to acquiesce. Briefly, our plan of escape was to get to Goa and change the identity of the *Ranee*, get fresh papers and wind up the whole affair in the neighborhood of Mozambique or Madagascar. We needed time for that.

The Cruiser would expect us to keep away from Goa, since we had been so explicit about going there. Goa was our only hope. If we had not succeeded in misleading the Cruiser people then the "whole jig was up." First though, we had to lay a trail that led away from Goa. That would mislead the rest of the Navy, and then we could double back at top speed to our real objective.

The Red Sea was the place for our false trail. It looks like a bottle neck, just like Cambay. If we could trick them at the entrance or near it, then we might have the whole lot watching for us to come out, for weeks after the quarry had doubled past.

The Red Sea was just the place for us, with the Suez Canal to the northwest and the Gulf of Akaba to the northeast at the head. Two doubles were possible, the final one being effected by hiding behind the Island of Jebel Zukker, near Aden. The Red Sea is ideal for all that sort of thing. Up one side and down the other as you please, and no one on either side cares

a fig what you are up to as long as you steer clear of Port Sudan. Inscrutable Arabia to the east and Egypt and Africa to the west. You can dodge along those shores for years if you like, absolutely unchallenged, into harbors, lying up behind islands, up estuaries. Endless hiding places. And best of all, Jebel Zukker would allow us to get in touch with all the supplies at Perim or Aden close by.

So it was settled.

The details were worked out later, of course, with scrupulous care, but you have our *ruse de guerre* in the egg.

My work on the bridge was a new sort of seafaring. Full of responsibility, and nothing to take my mind off it. I mean, the average master has long periods of absorption in problems of navigation, ship's business, etc., which relieve the strain of constant responsibility, particularly if he is a good mathematician. I had none of those things to fall back on. I could only keep the log in apple-pie order, and that I did, but that was soon done and then there was nothing but the thought of the emergency that might find me wanting, filling all my hours, the emergency that would call for prompt and drastic action. Done right, all well, danger past and overcome. Done wrong!—disaster for all concerned.

All the petty ship's discipline fell on my friend's shoulders, which were overloaded already, goodness knows. Reductions, deratings, water, oil, fuel, wind, weather, speed and all the thousand and one things that make a command at sea worse than a command in the field of war. For there must be no casualties. My friend was worn out with his double duties before we got the chief on his legs again, and thereby hangs the beginning of tragedy. "What, tragedy?" you say,— "we don't want to read a lot of sad things, we didn't buy this book for that, we have enough sadness in our own

lives, that we can't escape from, without that!" Quite so, yet tragedy is inevitable half-way through any life, but warmth and light is at the end, for all, even gaiety. Be patient a little, you are at the middle of this narrative, and the inevitable tragedy of it; soon you will come with me on the most fascinating of all human employments—treasure-hunting, real treasure, not a lot of dirty money got by bootlegging. Also there is light, and even gaiety at the end of my narrative, just as there is in your own life, if you will be patient a little. If you can find a little sympathy in your heart for poor Mrs. Casmyth, the maiden Uma-Durga-Parvati, the Flashing Tigress of the mountains of Hind, I would consider that courteous. But we are all so impatient nowadays, the only patiently courteous people left in the world seem to be Indians. Look here, I'll make you a fair offer, if you are patient now. I will try to persuade my publisher to include in this book the map of the treasure route. Then you can have a shot at it yourself. The treasure is still there, I have seen it, great heaps of it. Now I have done my part, do yours.

We made a snake's back of our flight, first out to the open sea, then due south as if we were making for Madagascar, taking care to be sighted on that leg, and then round, in the night, on our heel, off for the Red Sea.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LONELY ARABIAN SEA

While on the first false leg of our course I had the Kelvin sounder to attend to, and I was heartily glad of it. That occupied my mind. After that there would be nothing but a half-baked commander's fear of his incompetence, and time for,—reflection.

I could see "Reflection" standing like a shadowy specter just behind my shoulder, slowly stretching forth a hand to claim me. I could not shake it off much longer.

Up to the present I had been able to keep turning my back on the shadowy threatening thing. The time was getting close when I should have to confront it.

In the Arabian Sea on the night we turned on our heel for the Red Sea, the hand of "Reflection" fell heavily on my shoulder.

The Arabian Sea is lonely and vast, once out of the lines of traffic from Bombay to Aden or Madagascar. All is a waste of steel-colored water, steel sky, and the taste of steel in the very air. Days will pass without more incident than a soft plume from a spouting whale. There is no sea in the world more lonely or more sinister in all its aspects. Sometimes, a rare day, a hard beauty creeps into the scape, but it is a beauty of metallic tints, like deadly poisonous oxides, corrosives, fatal to any human life that is not completely protected from the potent evil of their touch.

We were exposed to the possibility of all evil in

that ocean. We were no longer entitled to the respect of our fellowmen or to their consideration. Our lives and affairs were for anybody's rifling that cared to assume the appearance of authority. Such is the price of illicit and ruthless exploitation of human institutions. There ends all sweet privacy and bracing independence. Our lives were no longer inviolate fortresses containing our souls. We had become a public nuisance, instead of being private citizens who may enjoy, as a right, every enviable social advantage which the sequence of civilizations has so laboriously produced.

We were hunted malefactors.

Even the sky and the sea seemed to frown at us.

Harsh and forbidding thy aspect, O Sea of Arabia!

Merciless thy sky!

And there would be no mercy for us, there or elsewhere!

My reflections took me to the start of it all. What was that, exactly? Could I find the strength of character within me to name it straightly and honestly? I am not sure that I did then or ever shall. Can the best man alive say such a thing, even to himself, alone in the privacy of the innermost chamber of his house? Sometimes in the silence of the night, perhaps, but the night is not fair; it frightens us into admissions under duress. The night is no proof.

The complexity of our basic motives is due as much to the complex nature of our forebears as anything in ourselves.

One thing was admissible, certainly: the present complexity I had introduced into my life was due in some measure to long residence in India, where Western ethics, even if kept inviolate, seem to droop and grow rank spindling, sapped of their full vitality. Even if they preserve, by rare chance, some measure of the vigor of their place of origin, they are prone to form

a facile union with Eastern mates. We know what that leads to in the physical world: Eurasian fruit, backboneless hybrids, of little use to the races from which they spring. No man can live long in the East and escape entirely from some sort of fusion or other, spiritually least of all. He will slip into some state of mental or spiritual matrimony without volition, without conscious advances, even while he is warned by safeguarding repulsions.

It happens to all, without exception, in a greater or lesser degree. Only the right opportunity is required to make the union bear fruit, the hybrid fruit of such loose unions, doubtful in all its values and standards.

Who said "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet"?

False.

They meet forever—in lechery.

They betray each other to death, in every conceivable form of irregular union, most completely when they most desire each other's welfare.

East, keep thy immemorial place, with dark mystery in place of a heart!

West, lust not after the soft mystery that shall betray thee to death!

I have confessed to an ineradicable taste for adventure, the "Wanderlust." "There is no more harmful thing to man than wandering," said Odysseus. Had he wandered in India, I think his Odyssey must have been an avatar of even more doubtful character than we know it, and finally ending in a disaster greater than my own. Had I been my own son, Telemachus-like, I should have listened to Pallas Athene, my mentor, Viroschand. As it was, I heeded no warnings, nor took council with any except companions in as desperate case as myself.

Such was the mixture of motive forces that brought me in the end to a common prison.

Thus did I examine my past life on the bridge of the *Ranee* dashing through the days and the nights, trying to escape from a relentless pursuer. And I was powerless to prevent calamity to myself and my companions.

But were we pursued? I had no doubt in my own mind that we were, in some way or other. For the sake of my friends I was capable of pretending still that we might shake off the pursuer. But that is all. In my heart I knew that Nemesis was stretching forth her hand from Bombay.

Vishnu the preserver had stayed the hand of Siva the destroyer as long as he could. Brahma the creator was veiling his face.

The clash between the lovers came very quickly. How could it be otherwise, in such circumstances? If all had gone well with us, that rending of two fine lives might have been postponed almost indefinitely. But our situation brought out the best in my friend and the worst in his wife. He wore himself to a shadow in the faithful performance of his double duties, performing them with the sustained attention to detail that the pitiless sea exacts. He became touchy and irritable in that stifling engine room, with the enervating climate on top of it all.

On top of it all did I say? The nerve-racking fear of the pursuer was on top of that.

His wife as a result suffered neglect. She had never been neglected before. She broke down utterly beneath the strain of it. A Western woman of the same caste, the companion in all things, for good, for bad, would have had faith in her man, performing her waiting part, the hardest, patiently, as sure of her reward as

her man could be. And there would have been no breakdown, or none so hopeless.

Mrs. Casmyth had different standards to guide her life; there were tiffs, then quarrels, then bitter words, periods of fierce self-pity, then—a drunken wife comforting herself with the bottle, from a neglect that seemed like harsh indifference.

My friend was Irish, as I have said, heroic in adversity, but hot and quick-tempered—violent in extremity of exasperation. There was another dreadful scene in the saloon. How the ship ran I do not know! I had to leave the bridge for hours, trying to patch up that wretched affair on that awful night. Fortunately the engineer was so far mended that he made shift to go to his duties for a while. Otherwise the ship might have gone to the bottom with us all.

Dawn brought a reconciliation as before, in which Mrs. Casmyth agreed to sign a pledge, formally, that she would never touch liquor again. My friend stood firmly, even brutally fast on this second pledge, in the fullest and most solemn form. The first had not been so drastic. This must be the end of strong drink for her. He might have saved the paper and ink and all those tears.

It did not save her in the end, with all its solemn formality.

“Now heaven help them both!” I thought.

“And heaven help us all!” I added, as I went back to my duties on the bridge.

## CHAPTER XX

### NO SIGN OF THE CRUISER

There was something very naïve and childlike about Mrs. Casmyth's behavior after that pledge business was all over. I suppose it was the result, in a great measure, of finding that her husband was not a cold and brutal ravisher of Eastern ladies, as she had fully persuaded herself before the tender aftermath of the pledge took place. Frankly, she behaved as if she had been a naughty child, and was to be completely forgiven now, as a charming and repentant one. And all was to be forgotten as well as forgiven.

That scene in the saloon shook me. Everything seemed tottering around us. I felt sure that the night held our pursuer and in the dawn I should see a plume of smoke on the horizon telling of the end.

As the day waxed fuller, and no sign of any ship showed on the vast expanse of waters, scan them how I would, I threw off the sense of impending disaster, and we all had breakfast together. I am not going to say it was a happy meal. But it was an interesting one, and showed me the child that Mrs. Casmyth really was. Also it was the first meal we had had together since our flight began. We had many anxious moments after that breakfast, but we never went back to that manly pigging along, with a hunk of bread and cheese in hand as we worked. That was what cut Mrs. Casmyth to the quick. To see the elaborate ceremonial of Western dining, with its amazing and fascinating intricacies of

linens and cutlery and glasses and stewards and menus, all suddenly flung aside, and herself with it. That, to a woman of a ceremonial-ridden race, was—wanton!

Meal after meal, she had superintended the flowers, worked out the number of knives and forks according to the menu and so forth, and we had never even gone down to see her handiwork.

Wanton, callous and cynical!

That was all over now, and she had her husband again, nearly the merry man of old. He had proved himself a giant in enterprise, and a master in his own household. Very well. If the beloved god would promise never to frighten her out of her life again, perhaps the damage was not so serious, after all. I am certain that is all she thought about it.

We were soon a happy ship again. Those two could forget so easily. I envied their facility in emotion. I could not forget. I wished most sincerely that I could.

It was with a view to ensuring some measure of permanence to their happiness that I called a council to suggest in plain terms the end of our trafficking. Dump the stuff that remained overboard, make straight for Jebel Zukker at the entrance of the Red Sea, hang up there for a few days, and then double back to Mandvi. Slip quietly out of the West into the East till all the trouble we had created blew over.

The council split on the disposal of the *Ranee*. At Katch or Karachi she might be apprehended, dismantle her how we would. Then if the ship was not properly disposed of, why bother to dump the opium? Both points incontestably true. I was in a minority on both points as well as outclassed in debate. I was disappointed. I had not the warming effects upon me of the newly plighted troth these lovers felt. So I suggested, in some bitterness, that it would be better to put me ashore at Jebel Zukker and let them finish the

matter as they thought fit. They would not be guided by me, it was evident.

That raised a storm of protest!

When it died down I confess I felt a much more important person than I was before. One likes to be appreciated, you know, and put as those two knew how, well—it was extremely grateful to me altogether. Against my better judgment then (I emphasize that, mark you)—against my firmest convictions, I was persuaded to go on and help them to complete our first scheme.

It is quite easy for you to say I should have insisted upon quitting my friends if they would not quit that ship and all that went with it. Please remember I was getting to the age when friends are not easily made, and not easily quit for the same reason, not in your own caste, that is. And a friend outside your own caste usually means below it. And there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, but that means if you stick to him, out of all reason, from higher motives than reasonable ones. So at the last I flung reason to the winds again, and stuck by my friends, as a decent man will. I knew it would mean going back to the lonely rôle of *tertium quid*, spare wheel, hanger-on to the skirts of romance, if you like, and what is worse, I knew that as soon as the engineer was fit for steady duty, I could go back to my old bony-fingered familiar, "Reflection." So did I tread again that weary round of conscientious scruples awakened too late. Where would it all end? that was the perpetual burden of my thoughts. If we were caught, all the money in Hind would not salve my conscience for being the chief instrument that shaped the events to jeopardize my friend.

The age-old irksome joke—am I my brother's keeper?—it would not be flung from my shoulders—and I began to realize that the galls of that yoke would

bite to the bone before I had done with it, or learnt to support it with proper fortitude and resignation. I thought of Viroschand, his gentle insistence on the danger of our enterprise, to our spirits as well as to our persons, and to those we proposed to deal with. He was aware now that we were engaged in a still more perilous occupation, his reply to my telegram in Bombay had made his attitude toward that perfectly clear. I could not shake off the thought that he had become aware of our trafficking long before my telegram reached him, in some mysterious Indian way, those channels of telepathic sympathy with which no Westerner has the slightest patience, since they are beyond his comprehension. I could not forget those semi-materialized promptings of my own conscience that had seemed like personal visitations at the time. All ignored and useless now.

I don't know whether I conjured up that last vision at sea myself. It is quite possible, and all the others before, I dare say. Detachment from mundane things is not difficult; it seems the most natural thing in the world in the moonlight of the lonely Arabian Ocean. Then the metallic harshness of sea and sky are mulcted of their sinister potency, to a great extent. The blue-black velvet of the sky is reflected in the world of water, the silver moon-glade in its midst. That night the crew of the *Ranee*, reflecting the ease of mind now increasingly evident in the minds of their masters, had gathered under the lea of the forward whale-back, for music; they were softly threading note into fine note, a delicate wreath of sound that seemed almost an integral part of the silver harmonies of sea and sky. I don't know how long I abandoned self to that rare detachment of spirit, that complete absorption into the fine essence from which all the potency of our lives comes and to which it will return at the last.

After a time, I remember I shifted foot and elbow as I leaned, chin in hand, against the bridge-rail—and Viroschand stood in the moon-glade!

I bowed my head on the rail. No need to look at that presence any more. Viroschand might try to warn us, but we had gone too far to turn back now; he would fail, and disaster would be our portion; that was my profound conviction. Flight was futile, even if successful.

Brahma had already veiled his face, sorrowing for his creatures.

I saw it all now. The sequence of the reverberations of our own disorderly acts must traverse their destined path till the force of the initial ruthlessness died out in harmless ripples.

I would be the last to escape from Siva's wrath, I, the most favored of Vishnu.

That companion I had plunged into the deep pool of lawlessness with careless disregard of consequences, he would perish, unable to save himself or his friends.

Yet Viroschand saved two, in the end.

All he could not save.

I knew myself in that moment to possess the greatest of all gifts and the most dangerous, the secret force, unconsciously exerted, of compelling my fellows to bend *their* life forces in aiding me to achieve my desires.

And my desires had been base—unBrahminical.

I had abused a great gift, not knowing how to employ it, nor ever having sought the way.

That gift would be taken from me.

"Shall be taken away, even that which he hath."—

Abandoned of Vishnu!

Personal disaster is nothing. Disaster brought upon loved ones, that is the deepest hell of all. There *is* no other hell. That is Siva's domain.

## CHAPTER XXI

### AN ARABIAN NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT

A few days later we were off the Island of Jebel Zukker, and with some difficulty arranged for the dispatch of the cables to Viroschand from French territory at Sagado. They were in cipher, our own business code, so we did not hesitate to make the rendezvous for the collection of the supplies on the Aden side, outside the Red Sea.

There is an arm of the Red Sea, at its head, that runs N.E. past the Sinai Peninsula, called the Gulf of Akaba on the maps. It is about a hundred miles long, and is as lonely as interstellar space, according to Western ideas, that is. We intended to slip up that Gulf and await the collection of our supplies, then dash for Aden, pick them up, and make straight for Goa at the first favorable opportunity.

When our business was completed at Zukker we set to work to find out all we could about the Cruiser. Razzan was our eyes, ears, and tongue in the matter, and he worked those organs to exhaustion in our service. He did everything possible, humanly speaking, to get news. There was none. It is my belief that the Cruiser never followed us across the Arabian Ocean. She knew we were bound to get caught if we returned to Indian waters, and some one else would catch us if we stayed in the Red Sea, or any other waters. Why worry about a few days, more or less, and why waste fuel on a quarry that must come to you eventually? That is what I think

now, but I did not think so then. I inclined to Casmyth's theory that the Cruiser had gone off on the false scent we laid at first in the direction of Madagascar.

Be that as it may, we got no news of her and we ran up the Red Sea, and we ran out of the Red Sea without molestation of any kind. Then we slipped up the Gulf of Akaba, leaving Suez on our port quarter in the night.

Then began the work of rigging an extra funnel and another mast. If by any chance the Cruiser did follow us this far, she would go to Suez first and we would get news of her from Rahzan, who was stationed there all the time we were disguising the *Ranee*. Frankly, we hoped that the Cruiser would follow us, for then we should have the whole of the Red Sea to run in as soon as Rahzan sent us news of her arrival at Suez. But as I say, we never knew exactly how far the Cruiser did follow us.

Strangely enough, a peace of mind and spirit had come upon me, now that I had a clear view of the penalty I must pay sooner or later. It is the unknown that makes us most afraid. I only wished to battle for my friends now, for myself I did not care. That is not a despicable form of recklessness, but it is a hardihood that confounds all Indian minds, that Western bravery that will grin in the face of the gods, like Egill, son of Skallagrim, who regarded not the gods, but trusted most in his own might. Rousing myself then, like those old Scandinavian heroes, I shook off my worst fears. If there was a price to pay I would pay it when it was due; if there was danger, then I would face that too, and perhaps after all, outface it. Dangers don't like to be outfaced, it gets them rattled when their bogey-bogey business is met with a reckless grin. What were those visions, after all, but the result of depression of spirit, accentuated by some incidence of physical phe-

nomena, prompting me to connect them with Viro-schand? Everyone has visions if it comes to that. I had exaggerated certain phenomena that are normal to the diviner part of our common human intelligence. That was all, I thought, in my new hardihood.

Visions or no visions, a fight at the last is always good.

I threw myself into the canvas-funnel-making and mast-rigging with all my heart. My friend and his wife, at all times now content with a life that gave them to each other in constant companionship, made a little room to one side of their happiness for me. A little place, I say, but enough in my new-found peace of mind. I never spoke to them of my secret conviction about the end of our voyaging. Why should I? Such knowledge is a hardship to be borne bravely by those who are destined to it by natural capacity. It is not for sharing, that capacity, it is as inherent as a birth-right, an unconscious possession for the most part, till suffering refines it into a clear sense of responsibility. That is the full stature of manhood. A certain whimsical sense of humor, too, braced me for the coming fight. No need to lose your sense of humor over the possession of much knowledge.

Even Mahomet, that solemnly destined Prophet, bore his load of knowledge with a saving grace of humor. When the mountain declined to move to him at his express command, given before the host of his followers, he rebuked the discourtesy of the mountain by moving toward it. Like the Prophet I knew I could never remove the mountain of trouble I had piled up. I could face it, and when necessary, go up to it at the appointed time. Meantime, each day has a golden vein of happiness for those who will mingle a little humor with their affairs, no matter how gravely they have compromised the future. A man should

be as big as the trouble he makes, or die in trying to be so.

Taking it all in all, I am not sure that those days of ship-rigging and so forth were not as happy as any we had on the *Ranee*.

There was enough work of a congenial physical kind to fill up the days, and we had music and endless discussions on poetry, and painting, and philosophy, in the evening. How absurd evenings are without those three things! How refreshed we go to our labor on the morrow, when we have them!

Casmyth tried to teach me to sketch on one idle afternoon, while we were waiting for our first coat of paint on the funnel to dry. I let him have the pleasure of his pains, that is, I let him do the work for me, so he naturally came to the conclusion that I was making some progress. I tried to interest Mrs. Casmyth in our modern poets, and the very old ones, for I care for very little in between, except Keats. I fancy the library on the *Ranee* was some previous owner's idea of the hundred best books. It was varied enough.

Keats she loved at first sight. Browning she thought far too clever, and so do I. A pity Mrs. Browning didn't write all Mr. B.'s poems, and vice versa! Both would have been great, in the finest sense of the word. Impaling an insect on a pin, even a human one, and describing its antics is not poetry, however minute the description. That is how she criticized Mr. B. I don't blame her. The Indian and Persian poetry she was brought up on deals with the finest possible emotions of the human mind only, delicate, subtle, fragrant.

I had a curious experience ashore about that time.

Casmyth had written some letters to people in the world we seemed to have left behind, or slipped out of in some mysterious way. He wanted to get them posted, and also he wanted to send some of his sketches home.

Dangerous work, too dangerous to try at Suez, so we agreed to make a trip to Port Said, the happy couple, that is; I was only to go as far as Suez.

The launch took us all to Tewfik, and there the serang found Rahzan, and he found a suitable craft for the journey to Port Said. I went back to the *Ranee* with the serang. In five days' time I was to be at Tewfik for the Casmyths. So I had all those lonely days to fill in, sketching, reading and writing up my private log. My sketching soon disgusted me, my reading tired my eyes and my log was soon complete to date. I looked around for a weapon to bash my old familiar, "Recollection," for he had confessed (under pressure) to "Reflection" being something of a courtesy title used to impress me. He was an impressive old thing at all times, but I didn't mean to have him hanging around too much, under any name, in any circumstances, in the future. He made me sufficiently restless though till I got interested in those mirages across the desert.

The Sinai Peninsula has always had a strange fascination for me. I don't know why, for it is the barest, bleakest spot on earth, or very nearly, yet it has an indefinable lure. The red and tawny ranges of hills that forever recede as you try to mount to a height to get a clear view, the vivid slash of green in a watered valley, the mysterious mirage-like oasis of tall palms with the unexpected flash of a white dome in the midst; ever changing, never changing, it is the same valley, the same tawny range—yet never quite the same. It is the soothing repetition of the desert with the added charm of an endless variety of elevation.

By the way, why is the Red Sea called so? It should be the Sea with the Red Shore. The sea is actually green, every kind of green, ending in the pure jade-

green of the Canal, the symbolic tint of all the exotic vice in the world.

For several days I had noticed a lovely little mirage from the deck of our ship, on the Sinai side. Domed mosques glimpsed among tall slender palms, some few miles inland (how far away is a mirage usually?)—impossible to say how many miles. The mirage came and went, like most mirages, like the Cheshire Cat in "Alice," but it seemed to appear about the same place on most occasions. One day I noticed the tiny brown specks of a caravan go into the mirage—and remain there.

"That settles it," I said, "that is not a mirage, it's an oasis, with a wonderful little desert town in the middle. I will visit that town."

"So, *that* to you, my good familiar friend,—'Ree,' or—'Flection,' or whatever your name is. This is where we part for a while."

Those lonely days had to be filled in somehow, so one day I set off across the burning sand in the first cool of the evening, telling only the serang of my projected excursion. I meant to be back, in any case, at dawn. He put me ashore and then returned to the ship.

I had a small luminous compass, and I had taken careful bearings before starting. The rest was walking in the starlight. Simplicity itself, you think. Not so. The Sinai desert at a distance looks as flat as a billiard table till you come to the mountain ranges, as easy to run across as the firm Long Island beaches. When you get down to the actual walking it is quite another story. Ridges, gulleys, stones, drifts, bluffs all over the place, and the consequence was that as soon as I lost sight of the ship I was pretty shaky about my bearings. Remember, my compass was small and inaccurate.

There was nothing to do but push on in the general

direction I had laid down for my march. I toiled on painfully, hour after hour, with blistered feet, and scratched and bleeding hands from my frequent tumbles over boulders in the dark. I got exactly nowhere after hours of that sort of thing, and I was exhausted and dispirited besides. Enough is enough. Sandwiches and a drop of whiskey in a sheltered spot, and then curl up till daylight; that seemed the only sensible thing to do. To go farther was only to get more completely lost, and I thought I had committed sufficient folly of that kind for one night. While eating the sandwiches, I heard the unmistakable bubbling of camels, on my right front. Could there be audible illusions in the desert as well as visual? Impossible! There must be camels about. Jumping up and running to the top of a ridge in the direction of the sound, I looked carefully around and saw—nothing!

Funny—I could have sworn to the camels grumbling and bubbling. Well—finish the sandwiches and turn in.

Hanged if I had got comfortably settled before the beastly bubbling started all over again!

From the same direction, too.

I had had my experience, I wasn't going scrambling impetuously up and down any more ridges in the dark; any noises in future could explain themselves, or go away. I had finished investigating bubbings in the Sinai Peninsula for the night.

I curled up again and tried to get some sleep.

But that infernal bubbling went off periodically, and idiotically, in the same place about every five minutes. It was hopeless to try to sleep. What was the beastly row anyway? I would make just one more search. This time I stalked the noise, carefully, only moving a few feet at each bubbling and, after half a dozen pauses, nearly fell head over heels on top of a camel resting under the very ridge I had climbed

first. I had been practically over it at first, but never thought of looking down at the ground below me.

It was a stray camel, saddled, with a broken head-rope.

I was in the saddle in a second, kicking it up with rousing hacks, and in a few moments, I was speeding across the desert in the direction of my oasis. That camel was a dream! We sailed over the ridges like a speed-boat in a sea-way. I took the strap of my flask and tied it to the head-rope and then sat down to enjoy the ride. It was dangerous, all amongst those boulders and ridges and bluffs, but it wasn't my camel, and in any case I did not interfere with the route the camel picked, the most frequent cause of broken legs, and necks too in the desert.

I had not been so far out in my sense of direction either, for soon some lights twinkled in the distance, and the oasis and the little town in its midst loomed up obscurely like a dark back-cloth in an Arabian Nights' play.

The camel had evidently broken away from this very village, for it was no more than a large village when I got up to it. He, or she rather, strode softly down the dark and deserted sandy street of the village, turned up a side alley and came to a halt at a high deep arch with heavy wooden doors in the bottom half. I kicked the camel alongside and started to hammer on the door.

At least I would be sure of some kind of welcome as the returner of a valuable camel. I hammered and hammered, but no answer came. Instead, lights and heads appeared in the windows of the adjacent houses behind the wooden lattices, and at last a voice to the left of the archway demanded in Arabic the reason of my presence there at that hour of the night.

Summoning my scanty Arabic, I replied.

"Here is one, lost in the night, and moreover a retriever of straying camels."

Sensation at the windows!

Bobbing of heads and general whisperings.

Long silence.

Then the original voice, high up on my left—

"Wait, O stranger! One comes to thee swiftly, bearing lights." Then the lights began to go out and the village returned to a death-like silence. I listened and looked for the bearer of lights, and away across the house tops I could hear the faint sound of drums and pipes playing those curious Arab tunes that seem like the wailing of souls in torment. The whole place wasn't in bed then as I had thought at first. Presently an old man, bent and leaning on a stick, hobbled toward me from a narrow doorway on my left, and I slid down to the ground to greet him. He explained that the camel was his property, and that his relatives were all out hunting this very beast. His gratitude was gracefully expressed, with a sufficient reserve in the terms, but it was boundless in its implication.

"Truly it is she, the truant, the priceless one"; then grave periods of wishes concerning my present life and my inevitably magnificent future state.

I replied in proper form, minimizing the whole affair to an almost impalpable significance, and finally the old man led the camel down to the end of the alley, opened a door into a dark yard, and led the camel in. Then he insisted that I come to his poor hovel of a house for refreshment. Of course it was not a hovel, far from it, and I took care to inform him that even by starlight its proportions were more than impressive.

It seems that the camel had been tied up, ready saddled, near the archway to which I had brought it (or it had brought me, rather), preparatory to some

morning journey, and it had broken away and bolted while no one was looking.

Now comes the most extraordinary experience of my life.

After I had washed and eaten, the old man said there were some famous fakirs or dervishes in the village, would I like to see them? I said I would be delighted. I was not tired, my ride had refreshed me and had not been long, and my host seemed very anxious to show me some marked form of hospitality. It would be an easy way of ending our encounter with satisfaction to both sides. Also there would surely be some one at the entertainment who could lead me back to the *Ranee* in the morning, a feat that was obviously beyond the strength of my old host. The old man got me a long white cloak, head-cloth, sandals, and a stick, and together we set off down the silent sandy streets.

That entertainment was incredible.

There is no other word for it.

I saw lovely dancing-girls swaying to amazing music in a circle of colored lights, the most seductive creatures displaying their half-veiled charms in the most mysterious lighting imaginable. It's the lighting that does it all. I smoked hashish, drank innumerable cups of assorted liquids, and then the dervishes came in.

What those fellows did scarcely bears description.

They ran red-hot needles through their heads, they lopped off their fingers and toes and passed them round for inspection, and they completely dismembered a boy and handed the bits round like pork-chops!

I am not asking you to believe this. I state it as something I saw.

The fakirs or dervishes, or whatever they were, first played their exquisite attenuated music, the lights began to change color, and some dancers appeared from

nowhere and began to spin and sway in time to the music. The music grew wilder and wilder, drums beating a furious tattoo; the dancers whirled faster, and wilder grew the music, maddening! dissolving the senses, liberating the souls of men in an exquisite frenzy! and with a howl of demoniacal fury they set about their swift horrors!

Suddenly the music stopped, the lights all died down (how I know not)—and the old man was leading me in the cold dark alleyway that gave on to the silent starlit street.

I reeled against a wall, gasping for air after the furnace of the entertainment of that Arabian Night. And then I heard the old man chuckling by my side—

“Now art thou a debauched smoker of hashish.”

So that was hashish.

Never again!

The old man found some of his kinsmen returned when we got to his house, and one agreed to put me on my way to the ship, saying it was only an hour's ride at a comfortable gait along a certain dried water-course.

So ended my first and last Arabian Nights' entertainment, and I have no desire to repeat it, if hashish is essential to its success, as I very strongly suspect. I suppose hashish has delayed effects on beginners, for I do not remember getting into my bunk on the *Ranee*, and I slept the whole of the next day. I awoke with a splitting headache, and a tongue like the bottom of a parrot's cage. I wish to have nothing more to do with hashish. I should like to see all that show again though, pretending to drink and smoke the while.

I wrote all this down just before setting off to meet the Casmyths, while it was fresh in my memory; it was put in an envelope, and sealed, and then placed in another envelope and despatched to my office in

Calcutta from Goa, with a lot of other papers I wanted to get rid of there. So I have given an exact account of the incident from notes made practically at the time of its occurrence.

You can believe as much or as little of it as you like.

I *know* I saw all I have written, and it happened exactly as I have described it. I believe I handled the dismembered boy.

But where did the boy go to?

That's when the lights went out, so it is not a fair question.

I went to meet my friends at Tewfik and told them something of my desert experience. Casmyth said he had seen the red-hot skewers, but never the boy in bits.

Nothing happens except in sequence. That entertainment could not be obtained by paying in mere money, not all the money in Manhattan or the treasure of Hindustan. One stumbles on the most wonderful things in life (how did you find that peerless pearl, your wife, Sir?), but it is through a series of stumbles ending in—that which was foreordained.

As soon as we got back to the *Ranee* we hoisted up our anchors and slipped down past the Gulf of Suez, keeping as close to the Arabian shore as we dared in the night.

Now for Goa, and the reincarnation of the *Ranee*.

## CHAPTER XXII

### I GO ASHORE AT ADEN

I suppose it is time I said something about my apparent inconsistency of behavior, some clever piece of casuistry that would please the critics (of books, not life),—some shrewd probing into my mental works, revealing a carefully hidden spring of action, making all my inconsistencies appear at once consistent. I have no intention of doing anything of the sort.

A horse is more consistent than a man.

A dog is more consistent than a horse.

And an ant more consistent still.

By the time you get down to microbes, consistency has reached such a pitch!—and, apropos of nothing, I wonder if a critic is more consistent than, shall we say an ant? If he is, he can give me a Roland for my Oliver by saying,—

“Who spent two years in prison, for inconsistency?” But he would be wrong, you know, for if I had been a consistent rogue I could have wriggled out of that penalty. “My dear fellow, consistency if inconvenient will get you into prison quicker than anything else in the world, quicker than inconvenient inconsistency even. You know it. Pooh! consistency proves nothing!”

Seriously, my business is only to tell you things exactly as they happened in that part of my life which I have chosen to call my Indian avatar,—an “Avatar in Vishnu Land,” a “spell” of Indian life, as they would say in the vivid vernacular of Eagle Land. If,

in one chapter I am bowed in shame and contrition before a vision, and in the next cheerfully confronting gods and men,—put it down to the natural and everlasting inconsistency of all human creatures, of the human intelligence, the quality that makes us different from horses, dogs, ants,—and the rest. But there is no inconsistency of narrative.

Singapore was to be our first objective after the transformation of the *Ranee* at Goa. This was the decision the Casmyths had come to on their trip to Port Said. My friend had been induced by his wife to hang up the Madagascar scheme indefinitely. Kenya, and a life entirely among sahibs, and mem-sahibs, had never been exactly to her liking. I was very disappointed, but I could understand her point of view. Our description of the African colony was sketchy and unsatisfactory, even to ourselves; to her it must have seemed a comical substitute for the life of a high-caste person. I was getting used to disappointment by that time, and to impending calamity; you can get used to anything, you know, provided you can retain some shreds of self-respect. The crash was coming, I felt convinced, and when it came I would be at the side of my friends to help them. If they would not take my advice, well, the crash would come all the sooner, that's all. In any case I meant to be in at the final fight, and that buoyed me up considerably. If I got half a chance I meant also to have one more try at buttering the stairs for Fate, to give those lovers a start, and push them on the road to security, in spite of themselves.

The voyage down to Jebbel Zukker was without incident. A pleasant trip, by night mostly, hiding up behind groups of islands, or in quiet bays, in the day. A week of such voyaging saw us almost in sight of Aden, with the bitter-cold wind of dawn blowing out

of Arabia, a boisterous and frigid welcome. We scouted around in the launch as soon as we got up behind Jebel Zukker, sent Rahzan ashore for news, and when he came back with the good word, we slipped round to cover on the N.E. side of the Arabian shore some thirty miles from Aden, on the following evening. We were out of the Red Sea then.

All well; now for the supplies.

We had been very lucky so far, it was no use tempting fortune too much, so it was decided that I should go off at once and get in touch with our agent in Aden.

"There is nothing to worry about," said Casmyth as I set off. "Aden is much too cosmopolitan for you to be remarked, unless you go and make yourself conspicuous in some way."

"I know, but how am I to get to that agent without asking a lot of questions?"

"Rahzan's going with you, let him do all that. You go into one of those cafés opposite the harbor *bund*, and wait there till Rahzan comes back. Whatever you do, don't hang about the water-front. The scum of the desert is always collecting in Aden, and you might get your throat cut for the sake of your trouser buttons. Above all, no shooting, even if you are attacked. We simply must not attract any attention."

"All very well, but suppose I am attacked."

"Put on some good thick boots, and use them on their shins and groins."

"Sounds pretty brutal."

"Damned sound scheme, I've proved it so more than once."

So I went below and put on a pair of heavy sea-boots—loaned by the purser. Those boots saved me, not from scoundrels ashore, but from being hamstrung at sea, as you shall learn very soon.

Suez is bad, but Aden is worse, quietly.

Why Aden should exist at all is a mystery, except as an Eastern Gibraltar. The place is nothing but a few crannies and ledges on the face of the livid rock, near the sea's edge. The whole of the water for domestic purposes has to be distilled from the sea. There are about six trees, imported at great expense, and alas, all doing badly despite the tenderest horticultural care and skill. Raffish sun-blistered shacks line the waterfront, which is merely a narrow shelf at the base of the great headland towering hundreds of feet sheerly to the arid plains of Arabia above. And there is nothing else—by day. At night, a sinister hush descends on the town, and envelops it completely. Violent death seems to lurk round every corner where the great fizzing arcs do not penetrate. There is no glamor about the vice in the narrow alleys skirting the base of the rock. Stark, staring, despairing brutality stamps the whole place.

Tobacco smuggling on a startling scale is the occupation of the bulk of the lower-class inhabitants. Practically every other ship that comes into the roads takes in half a ton or so of fine Egyptian tobacco, through her lower ports, to be hidden under the coal in the bunkers by the stokehold crew.

Such a population knows no law, except seize and kill, or be killed in the failure to seize.

Nature puts the whitest white against the blackest black, invariably. In Aden, the colony of ostrich feather merchants is curiously mild in manners and comparatively honest. Each night sees them barricaded in their houses and go-downs, till the light of day gives promise of some security to life and property.

The night is tremulous with the hushed activities of the tobacco-running gangs.

I know Aden well, and I did not like my mission at

all. Yet I could not expect Casmyth to leave the *Ranee* at such a time, in such a place.

I clumped down the gangway to the launch in my big sea-boots; Rahzan and the serang catching me cleverly as I jumped to the stern-grating heaving dizzily below me, the scrubbed-white teak splashed to brightness by the spray thrown off the *Ranee's* towering sides. We had no lights, except the one at the top of the gangway.

Just before I started on my thirty-mile run, Mrs. Casmyth came to the top of the gangway and said, "Mr. Warburton, do you think you could get me some ostrich feathers, big ones, unbleached, about twenty?"

"Of course, with pleasure; cast off forward!"

"And Mr. Warburton!"

"Yes, what is it now, some hairpins?"

"No, some whiskey, for yourself," she added quickly, "our stock is nearly out, the steward tells me."

"Oh bother the whiskey, let's drink" (I nearly said "champagne," but turned it clumsily to "ch-ider." Champagne was her tragedy, you know).

I saw her put her hand up to her eyes; even in the light of that discreetly shaded gangway lamp I saw enough to realize what an ass I had been. Well, it was done, best clear off.

"Cast off aft," I called softly to the serang.

"All gone, sahib!"

Half-speed ahead and spinning the wheel hard over I heard Casmyth call as he came tumbling down the gangway. "Wait," said he, "hard astern a minute."

"Good Lord, what is it now?" I said, handing the wheel to the serang again.

"What have you been saying to my wife? She is crying like a child."

"Nothing at all."

"You have, out with it, old man."

Then I told him of my stumble on the forbidden topic—or near upon it—too near for her nimble wits. We had agreed that champagne was never to be drunk or even mentioned—till we had weaned her away from its grip somewhat. That was the least we could do.

“Terrible,” said Casmyth, slowly going up the side. “I had thought all that was over.”

If his wife was sad as I left, my friend was sadder, and I think I was the saddest of all. I knew “all that” is never over, with a woman, once it has passed the bounds set for it by the preserver of order in all things, the bounds of Vishnu, who setteth all things within bounds.

I had a knowledge my friend did not possess.

The mark of Siva was on my friend’s wife.

That was my knowledge.

I had reason to be saddest of all.

For my knowledge was valueless. I was powerless to use it. Plunged in these reflections as we sped through the night, I was recalled to immediate affairs by a touch on my arm—

“Sahib,” said Rahzan, “many evil spirits are abroad this night, let us turn back to the ship.”

“Rubbish, what do such as we care for spirits, good or evil?”

“True, sahib, in reason, but this night is full of them, and all evilly disposed toward men. Thou knowest I am not timorous, sahib, being the son of that man who fought the devils of the Great Thar that forever guard the Treasure of the World. But sahib, the stars are against us too, turn back out of these black waters while yet we may, sahib.”

It was true you know, one glance at the sky showed me that.

“No, Rahzan, I will not be advised by thee. If our appointed end is at hand let us rather go boldly forward

to meet it. Thou shalt stay by the boat in the harbor—I go to complete our business, as arranged many days past.”

“Nay, sahib, I did but seek to know fully thy heart in this matter; I will perform my part in the business arrangement as agreed,—for truly—there be as many devils behind as before on a night like this!”

Good old scout, he too sprinkled his philosophy with a little salt of humor. I could hear the old rip chuckling as he went forward to his place in the bows.

Had I been an Indian, I suppose I should have confirmed my old comrade in his fears and together we should have decided to abandon the trip. The night was eerie with evil portents.

Being what I am (with all my faults, and inconsistencies)—I said,

“An there be prophecies, they shall fail!”

Then I took over the wheel from the serang, flung open the throttle, and we crashed full speed ahead over the heaving blackness, bounding from crest to crest in a smother of spray. We had twenty-odd miles to go in that sea-way before we could hope for the least shelter. Oil-skins for everyone and damn the night, and all the devils of hell to boot!

When at last we ran into shelter, out of the bracing battle with wind and waves, the smoothed hush of the sheltered sea seemed more sinister than before. The towering darkness of the beetling cliffs held the shapes of all human fears, crouching in their sea-slimed fastnesses. What was that heart-gripping fear that Rahzan knew to be potent devils in league against us? Perhaps it was the aura that clings to all excessively wicked places. There are such things.

One knows the cloistral peace and sense of security that pervades the vicinity of an ancient cathedral. The least sensitive of mankind has remarked that,

in his time. Not a doubt about it. Why not the reverse?

Fear gripped us all again.

What was awaiting us? surrounding us? pursuing us?

Siva and Vishnu battled for possession of our souls that night. That is how Rahzan would have put it, telling the matter in the good way of Hind, nothing omitting nor marring, that all at the end might be plain, clear as the mysterious mud of Ganges.

When the launch was about five miles from Aden, still keeping as close as we dared to the steep Arabian cliffs, I thought I heard the sputter of a starting motor, somewhere on our port bow, in the shadow of the deep recesses of the rockbound shore. A fisherman, going home with his nets perhaps? How? That is a Mediterranean trick, there are no motor fishing-boats in these seas. Well, what was it then? Customs craft? Uneasy conscience!—would they not go straight to the *Ranee* if they knew of our presence at all!

What then? Whatever the craft was, it was coming over to cross our bows, very quickly, too.

Phut, phut, phut, on our starboard bow now—another! and, great Scot! another behind!—and in front as well!

Surrounded!

Now what manner of men were these that swarmed out of the darkness?

Thugs!—common thieves of the Aden rock, using the sea for their sneaking wolfishness. We had been remarked by someone, then. Sentinels watching the roadstead, warning the evil brood of suitable prey.

More were coming, I could hear them far away on either hand, too far to distinguish in the starlight. The nearest craft was the one ahead, about three hundred yards.

“Rahzan!”

"Sahib!"

"Bring all hands aft, and let each provide himself with a weapon, of iron if it may be, spanner, crow-bar, boat-hook, and have ready thy long knife. As for me I take the great axe in the stern locker."

"*Atcha*, sahib."

"I will ram the boat ahead."

"*Bote atcha*, sahib," (chuckles in the dark).

That was simple, British, but was it enough? No, never, a ruse alone could save us from a swarm of foes like that. What ruse? any ruse! Ah! so did Cæsar's poor fleet deal with Pompey's naval might before Marseilles.

We were steel—they were wood, doubtless.

So be it. In steel! out steel! and in again! but ever into soft wood.

That was the trick.

Now, a steady course, no wavering, straight for the bows of the oncoming craft.

"Serang!"

"Sahib!"

"All our speed astern as I raise my right hand, all forward as I raise my left and stay thou close at my side at all times."

"*Bote atcha*, sahib."

Twenty yards now, dead-ahead.

Crash!

Not so. I raised my right hand, spun the wheel hard over, and as we heeled, gunnel under, with all the new speed released at the bidding of my left, we smashed into the flank of our dumbfounded enemy!

One!

All sunk and driven under.

Next?

The boat on our starboard bow. They were too

close and going too quickly to change their direction much, and their engines were not like mine.

Full amidships! Some of them jumped for our gunnel, knifed, bashed and hammered into the swirling wake. Next a big boat, slowing up on our port side—softly, now, they have grasped our method of fighting. No need to take excessive risk. There are enough men on her to settle our business if they jump aboard us smartly.

The other boats were all coming up now, hand over fist. I peered around for smaller fry. Impossible to judge in that light; no matter, here comes number three, half-speed, ready to throw his scoundrels aboard us.

“Slue starboard, slue port, full speed ahead, serang!” Hard down, half-full of water, we swung round in a flume of foam and took their battle cruiser in the stern! They could not jump aboard us fast enough to do us much mischief. A few got over our bows before they began to settle stern first.

“Forward lads, tear and eat ’em. That’s the style; a watery grave is too good for such! Stand by all! I’ll take their damned nose off.”

So sank number three.

Then, calamity!

The last ram threw our engine half off its bed-plates, and with a sickening roaring and grinding, it coughed out its life.

“Sahib, sahib! jump with us and swim for life in the sea!”

“Stop that! *puckero! tano! boat hi! munta!*” Some of my crew were already in the water. I ordered all aboard, dragging in those who hung back, Rahzan and the serang helping valiantly. That way lay certain death from sharks. There was just one more loophole of escape. Then, like some nimble-witted son of the

South, I burnt my brains to plot and plan for all, for the best, in a moment of desperate need.

"Rahzan! this may be our last moment of life, take heed to what I say; when the next boat is near enough at hand, grapple with the boat-hook and make fast, —then at the shout of—'*Thik Hi!*' let all men follow me as I jump on board and let each man sell his life dearly, for the appointed time to die hath come upon us all, I verily believe. Better a death in the grip of a man, even the worst of men, than the griping of sharks' teeth in the vitals! Grip fast each man his weapon, they come!"

*"Atcha, sahi, bote atcha!"*

Steady,—now—"*Thik Hi!*"

*"Thik Hi! Hi! Hi! Hi! Crash!"*

"Ah! Ah! Ugh! Hi! Bang! Hi! Hi!"

"Soors! Die!!"

Blood was running into my eyes, and the salt taste of blood was in my mouth as I laid about me with the axe. Men fell before me ere I touched them, or so it seemed; as the battle raged I stamped on faces dimly seen at my feet, jabbed, hacked, and fell headlong, thrusting upward, up again, down, and always to the side away from our launch. Two men fell across my legs and a spasm of pain jerked my knee into the jaw of one as I kicked the other overboard. We were all fighting in water now, gunnel under, we must capsize in a second or two, and then suddenly, the boat righted as our last assailants flung themselves overboard rather than face the fury of my maddened crew.

I jumped to the engine, still turning over spasmodically, and pulled all the levers I could see or feel—Vishnu was on our side that night—I found the accelerator! Siva lifted his hand from us, but Vishnu nearly had to use his fish-tail to dive for us.

The rest of our enemies fled into the night from

whence they came at the sight of four of their boats' crews done to death. They were amphibious scorpions and snakes, but not amphibious enough,—for us.

We won the last fight by the unexpected nature of our attack; they never expected it to take place on their own craft, and the sight of their previous losses, so mysteriously overwhelming, made us seem fiercer than the sharks that inflamed the waters around.

So ended the battle of Aden, within four miles of that harbor.

I took our launch in tow, and slowly made for the lights of the ships riding in the distant roadstead. My cheek was laid open from forehead to chin, and I had a lump on the back of my head as big as a duck's egg. I never knew about either of those wounds till the battle was over, except for the taste of blood in my mouth. The wound in the back of my knee was not serious, thanks to my sea-boots. But for them, I should have limped to my dying day. Minor cuts on breast, back, and arms I will pass over.

One of my men was in a bad way, and one was missing. The rest had some ugly cuts and gashes. No bad bleeding though anywhere, except in the case of Rahzan.

Rahzan, that mighty fighter, who had lashed the boats together under a hail of blows, was streaming with blood from the crown of his head to his waist. But the only serious thing was a long gash that had ripped the flesh of his arm from wrist to elbow. He chuckled for two days on end, despite his severe wound.

We ripped up shirts, and stripped off my puggaree, (about twenty yards of fine muslin wound round a sun-helmet, found in the cabin of the launch)—and so we bound up our wounds and made merry together as men will, and should, after a successful fight, when,

skilfully turning great odds aside, they vanquish a host with a handful.

"An there be prophecies, they shall fail!"

I had to make certain of our supplies.

I steadfastly set my face toward Aden. The serang was scarcely hurt, and I was glad, for he was no longer a young man. He took the tiller of the boat we had captured, while I made shift to examine her engine.

Engines are amazing things. Like women, exactly. They may be bad, but they are good enough if the master be sufficiently bad likewise. By all my previous experience of internal combustion mechanics, that engine ought to have ceased its asthmatic career many years before I ever saw it. Yet it continued to wheeze and shudder (with the energy of despair, I suppose) towing a heavy steel launch into Aden, and out of it, back to the *Ranee*, a distance of over thirty-five miles.

All things move to their appointed end, at the time appointed, not before. But the avatar of that engine was near its consummation, as I shall relate in time and place.

The serang found our agent. I was unpresentable and so was Rahzan, so I sent him a note stating my business, and got a full and satisfactory reply in about an hour. The launch was taken in tow again, as soon as we had got the ostrich feathers and the whiskey. The serang found these things, how I know not, and I was getting to the state where I did not care much, could not indeed. I have made it clear in the description of his behavior at Allahbunder that the serang was a man of considerable acumen; lucky, too, in all his dealings. That must suffice in explanation of those things.

So in the rose and gray of the dawn, we returned to the *Ranee*, slowly, partly on our shields, and partly carrying them.

Casmyth was on the bridge and called the anchor watch at first sight of our convoy. The anchor was already buoyed, so we slipped our cable and turned on our heel, to sea. We lost that anchor.

Dead slow ahead as I staggered up the gangway, half-speed ahead as the serang shouted "All fast!" And "Let her go!" said Casmyth to the quartermaster as he turned to me.

"Now, let's have it."

"Nothing—serious that is."

"Nothing serious! Have you looked at your shirt lately?"

I looked. I was drenched with blood from chin to waist, and I had never known of it.

"Here! Come on down to the saloon,—hold up!—hi!—there! steady, lie still old man, I'll get you a stiff *peg*."

Fainted, or near enough, as my friend supported me to the chart-room lockers. A good stiff three-fingers of whiskey, with a splash of soda-water, made me feel a little less like death warmed up. Then I was bathed, rebandaged and disinfected, and a cheroot put in my mouth as I lay on the piled-up leather cushions of the chart room, happy, worn out, sleepy,—and very glad I had done it all, at my age.

"We were attacked by water thugs, near Aden."

"I warned you."

"Gad! I was glad of those sea-boots."

"You seem to have had a real good time; what is the total damage?"

"One man gone for keeps, Rahzan ripped from wrist to elbow and battered generally into a state of almost Hibernian happiness, serang safe and sound, cuts, gashes and slashes for the rest, and the launch engine all scuppered up—and, oh! I nearly forgot, one prize—are we towing it by the way?"

Casmyth called for the serang, who said the launch was inboard, wreckage and all, and that the thugs' craft was towing aft, making very heavy weather.

"Cut it adrift," said Casmyth.

"Not so," said I—"we will consummate a long weary avatar, help me aft off this bridge."

Together we went to the taffrail in the stern. The heavy shore-boat was pulled up to our quarter, and two men heaved a fire-bar, endways, through her bottom. She sank in half a minute—just rolling wearily in our white wake so long.

"That's that," said Casmyth,—“better than cutting her adrift, I agree.”

"Even so," said I.

"Now, if you can keep awake that long, let's have a look at the agent's letter. Come down to the saloon, no noise please, my wife has just fallen asleep, she was worrying and crying—about—you know, poor girl."

"Ah!"

"Well, that letter, what's he say?"

"Here it is, read it for yourself."

"Thanks—um—um—whew! two days to wait, that's bad."

"Read on, there's worse yet."

"Gad! 'a tanker, on a bearing,' um—um—'latitude so an' so, longitude so and so; not an easy job for us, with a Parsee skipper to deal with.'"

"No doubt of it, it's the son of the agent, read on."

"What's he say? the double dutchman,—'aforesaid tankering ship containing within all your esteemed instructional invoicements as per yours previous instant two weeks; emanating Jebbel Zukker,'—I suppose he refers to the fuel and all the rest of the general stores?"

"He does, and he is a fast worker, that Parsee. He must have collected every blessed thing on the French

side ready to go to sea at forty-eight hours' notice; good work, I think."

"Good enough—if that latitude and longitude work out anything like sense."

"How do you mean?"

"He may be whole degrees out in his day's work, for the time he names, and we may sail round and round each other for days."

"Is it as bad as that! Well, we must live in hope, he may be a better sailor than you think, the Parsee."

"The signal is,—‘send aid, broken propeller,’—when he sees our signal—‘what is your trouble,’—in two hoists: there's a sailor in it somewhere, so there's hope," said Casmyth.

The conceit of sailors! Well, to make a long story short, we found our consort, and completed our fuelling at sea. The skipper of the "tankering ship" was a young Parsee, with horn-rimmed spectacles! and a small tin helmet painted all over with signs of the Zodiac, or something like that, but he was "on to his job all right," keen as mustard on captainizing, full of "bundabust," "go get it," you know, or "come deliver it," to use a more accurate cliché.

Good luck to him, he may be an admiral yet—up the Persian Gulf near Basra, where you can see land on both sides. His navigation was chiefly inspiration, I fancy.

So we swung off on the long southern trail, S. by W., with a point of West, across the Arabian Ocean, bound for that remnant of a mighty Indian Empire—Goa.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WE CAMOUFLAGE THE "RANEE"

I have already hinted pretty plainly that we went back to our old trafficking. These things happen every day, to other people; we see them around us and they disgust us. The recording of such moral, ethical, myopia in oneself is not one whit easier, afterwards, though curiously enough we rarely feel any great degree of disgust with ourselves, at the time of the recurrence of our faults.

The truth is, we do not clearly recognize such actions as personal turpitude at the time they occur. We have a genius for finding fancy names for it. Later we do see the thing clearly, and with the proper name comes shame and contrition, but rarely disgust with ourselves, fortunately.

Disgust means—self-destruction! The inability to find any excuse for our conduct within ourselves. We know our own handicaps so well, that they are inconceivably greater than anyone else can possibly suffer. When even these will not justify us that is the end. It rarely gets as bad as that, in a healthy body; usually the threatening danger, consequent upon our doubtful actions, is lifted. Then the lessons we had sworn never to forget—are forgotten—and too often we slip back into the old ways that we resolved to abjure. Then we get the final warning.

Frankly, I have to record that we ran two more consignments of opium, big ones, before the final crash came.

By the time we arrived at Goa, the Cruiser had become a thing of the past, the dangerous but remote past, a subject for quiet jocosity almost. The voyage across the Arabian Ocean was delightful.

My friends had bought new music and books at Port Said, and as each pleasant evening followed its fellow, a sense of well-being and security laid to rest all the worst ghosts born of our past nervous tension.

I went ashore at Goa in the launch, now once more in commission after a very drastic overhauling, and spent two days with Rahzan, making diligent and discreet inquiries about our late pursuer the Cruiser, also about visitors to Goa, projected or otherwise, and our own reputation along the coast.

We had flattered ourselves with apprehension. The people ashore had never heard of the exploits of the *Ranee*. They knew the ship by sight, of course, from her previous visits. As for a reputation, we simply hadn't got one.

Very well, no one cares a fig what goes on in Goa.

We could get on with our disguises at once. What fools we were to start all that elaborate camouflage, our safety lay in having no reputation! It only intrigued the Goanese and never deceived the authorities who were after us.

In a convenient creek about twenty miles from Goa, the *Ranee* became the *Mumatz Begum*, with three funnels instead of two (originally one, you know, and still one, for business purposes). Also three masts, all raking well aft instead of straight, the same as the funnels; square-rigged yards on the foremast, and a carefully modeled clipper bow of eight-inch plate, with a fine long bow-sprit, jack and dolphin striker. That was enough. No one would have recognized the old *Ranee* in the new *Mumatz Begum*, even if he rowed around at a distance of fifty yards.

Or so we thought.

But the fact is we created a type of craft that isn't on that coast. It simply doesn't exist in the Indian Ocean. There are any amount of ships like the old *Ranee*. What fools we were! And yet I don't suppose it made much difference either way.

We were the better part of a week transforming the ship, all happily supervised by my friend, to the delight of his wife, who had a great grimy Vulcan once more for husband but this time always at her beck and call. That made all the difference. To see her sitting on his knee, dabbing his grimy face with a scrap of silk and lace—well I didn't look at it. I went out of the saloon as soon as it started.

When all was in readiness for the *Mumatz Begum* to take the high seas, we ran our first consignment of opium ashore, right into the harbor, under the very noses of the Goanese port officials. Why should we bother about them? *They* never bothered anyone, and besides, they hadn't a launch that could get near us if they had thought of trying. Also the *Ranee*,—*Mumatz Begum*, I mean, was always ready for sea, with her anchor buoyed.

The fact is the place is a regular nest of smugglers of sound wines, spirits and other things less harmful.

The port officials are lenient to a degree with exports, and they have not the power or the energy to be anything else with imports. We never even inquired whether opium was contraband or not. While I held the whole Customs staff in animated conversation on one side of the harbor, trying to declare a perfectly innocuous invention for extracting the fiber from banana skins (purpose of fiber not stated)—Casmyth ran the whole consignment ashore, on the other side. I believe the machine would extract fiber; it was strong enough to extract elephants' teeth, being composed chiefly of

the defective parts from the marine engine of the launch. The principal thing was the specification, and the sketches, all hatched in section, and tinted in elevation, with numbered and lettered schedules of the operations, all in triplicate. I did one, the purser did one, and Casmyth of course did the original design.

The port authorities were courteous, as all Goanese people are, but they insisted on the matter being submitted in quadruplicate form. I courteously refused, and hinted that they might hear more about it if they stood upon the letter of the law in that way. That was a perfectly safe statement to make, besides it made them think we had powerful friends at court, and they compromised on a set of photographs to be taken by the local portrait artist, at my expense. Those photos never were completed to my satisfaction, naturally, though they were paid for several times over. The state of technical perfection I worked that dusky photographer up to was worth all the money we spent on the farce. He was a Koncanese, as black as the ace of spades, but very handsome and intelligent, like all the people of the Koncan. He never saw the model, or I am certain he would have tumbled to the joke. Not that he would have "blown the gaff;" those people are as merry as Baluchis, they look upon life as rather a lark if you know how to manage it, much as English people do.

Officially then, we were in the town on definite business connected with a fiber-extracting invention, from the ubiquitous banana skin. Everyone in the place knew about our invention, and we were welcomed wherever we went. The officials lapsed into their natural state of graceful coma, believing us to be engaged in the impossible task of outwitting them by means of local talent. They were certain I would have to get down to it and produce another set of drawings, speci-

fications, schedules, etc. So everyone was pleased about everything connected with us and the *Mumatz Begum*.

Do you know, I almost began to believe in that fibrous fiction myself. Certainly there is fiber in bananas, particularly young green ones, and goodness knows, there are plenty of bananas there. The forests of Canara behind Goa would produce bananas and fiber to clothe the world ten times over. Every puddle of water, every bath-waste or leaky drain has a forest of banana trees round it in a week or two, in Goa. You can't stop the bally bananas. But I must stop my chatter about them.

After landing our consignment we took in some fine wines and cigars. Casmyth had already begun to feel a brute about that last pledge he had made his wife sign, and he thought that with care and patience he might foster in her sufficient self-control to enjoy those light harmless wines, Collares and Tinto. I knew that was wrong. I have dealt with female drunkards before. Not so my friend; I don't believe he was capable of accepting the fact of a hopeless drinking woman. That is perfectly natural in a sailor. They are away from all womankind about nine-tenths of their lives, and they come to believe that all women are angels incapable of anything bad but a little amiable folly, which is true in the main. The rare exception does not exist for the average sailor, and that was what his wife had become, long before he met her. He paid dearly for his incredulity.

I held my tongue at the time my friend made his proposal in regard to the wines. Everything seemed to point to a cessation of trouble of all kinds. Goa is like that. A spirit of *dolce far niente* pervades the place, "Kooch purwanayah," as the natives say, "good time coming,"—always coming.

So the good wine came aboard. There is an exquisite liqueur there, called "Anise Crystal" originally from

Portugal, I suppose. We took on several cases of it. Sufficiently sweet, and never palling in its sweetness, like most liqueurs of that kind. It is the gossamer fairy of drinks, and the widow's cruse for increase. Here is the recipe for the crucial increase. But first I should tell you the bottle containing the liqueur has a lovely crystal tree inside it, incredibly filling the whole diameter of the bottle despite the narrow hock neck. I suppose the "tree" is inserted flat, like the full-rigged ships sailors arrange in bottles, and later pulled out with threads and wires. The crystal effect is produced by first filling the bottle with a solution of fine sugar, which deposits on all the tiny branches of the "tree," eventually becoming like a delicate filigree of crystal foliage, prettier than anything Jack Frost ever painted on a Xmas window-pane.

Then the liqueur is introduced. Age does the rest.

Now, when your bottle of liqueur is about three parts finished, get a bottle of Champagne Fine, and fill the liqueur bottle up with that. Allow it to stand for a week, —and, *Voilà! Mesdames et Messieurs!* another bottle of liqueur as good as the first! Better I think, but that is a matter of taste.

Naturally there is a limit to this conjuring trick, but that you must find out for yourself. Why not? One day you may come across a bottle of "Anise Crystal," yes indeed you may. I found a bottle of rare and exquisite liqueur in a delicatessen store not a hundred miles from Boston, the other day. Not "Anise Crystal" of course, but it seemed almost as good, after my rather dry years in New York. The "Wops" who kept the delicatessen store sold it to me as "some kinda sauce." I had seen the label afar off, on the top shelf at the back of the shop, and knew it despite the dust of ages.

Softly! Hist! are we alone?—there remains another bottle yet!

"The all-consuming hour relentless falls."

Urgent private affairs may demand that I return to Boston at an early date.

If by any fortunate chance you do find a bottle of that Fairy Crystal Fluid, telegraph me at my expense. I will come any reasonable distance to show you the exact method of procedure with your find—to make it a veritable flowing bowl—and to test the mixture for you at all its stages toward maturity. I will charge you nothing for the use of my palate, and I will not spare it in your service.

Goa lulled us to sleep; the days were temperate for that latitude, as we were nearing the cold season, and the nights were delicious. In the cool of the day we made excursions to all the places worth seeing nearby, and there were many. We sketched the ruins of the mighty Cathedral, and the picturesque streets and mansions. I have my pitiful attempts at that employment before the Cathedral, on my desk as I write; even my ineptitude could not miss all the beauty of that exotic Gothic grandeur. If only I had Casmyth's sketches—they would be worth a small fortune in New York, but they went down with the ship in the Red Sea. He should have been an architect, not a sailor, he had just the right firmness of grip in practical matters, combined with the requisite sensitivity of graphic expression. Yet I don't know, he had not much imagination, though that does not seem to be a quality much in evidence amongst architects now-a-days, at least if one may judge by the stereotyped fronts (elevations I think they call them) which architects put up in New York with such dreary persistence. Architects all seem to me much like "Les Moutons de Panurge," chiefly occupied in getting into the same ditch as those preceding them, for the excellent reason that they are

following the established precedent in regard to the ditch.

Really I know very little about such matters, and I may be quite unqualified to judge such fine things. Yet a business man develops a sense of fitness and propriety by continual encounters with the actual facts of life. I am entitled to say that modern architects seem to me to lack the better sort of business qualities, that is, fitness and practical worth. That is probably the reason why most architects starve.

Religious festival follows festival in almost unbroken succession in Goa, all solemn ceremonies attended with grave enjoyment by the entire populace. It almost seemed as if the streets were laid down for this purpose alone, there are no other forms of traffic worth mentioning. It is difficult to give a just idea of the admirable order and dignity of these functions as they remain today. It is quite impossible to conjure their impressiveness when they expressed the solemn sense of religious devotion at the heart of a mighty Eastern empire. Yet one sees clearly that the Portuguese must have been the greatest race that Europe ever sent to India.

What may one say of such experiences, so sad in their implicit references to a mighty heritage long squandered, so pathetic in their unconscious veneration of a shrunken corpse of grandeur, scarcely more than a ghost beneath the tattered and tarnished vestiges of an ancient panoply.

One may say, "*sic transit*," "how are the mighty fallen," or "effete anachronism," or, "shackling suffocating" tradition. It depends largely on the standards which geographical accident of birth confirm in us as principles; or prejudices, for one is all too frequently the other in dealing with unfortunate or poorer neighbors. I do not wish to be misunderstood, I am no advocate of loose principles—don't I know where that leads

wave of sound common sense rose up and swept over their easy mechanics. The more medicine progresses the less it seems willing to do for mankind. Pay all you have or can borrow, into the mangle you go, turn the handle smartly—outside—next patient please! What, you are still sick! Well, that's your fault, you can see for yourself you have been properly mangled!

And as for curing or relieving a little gout in your elbow!—let us change the subject again. Give me an old-fashioned doctor with decent manners, and a little human sympathy; he'll help me to die like a gentleman anyway.

I bought a few things in Goa which I had long desired. Six starched shirts in fact, for to dine in decency. You remember the "tuck" I bought in Bombay. It was quite worth wearing out. Casmyth had some white mess-jackets made, and also bought some shirts and collars.

Gad! it was good to feel civilized again at sunset, with the first *chota peg* on its appointed way.

Mrs. Casmyth ravished us with a succession of exhilarating millinery enterprises when she saw that we were not sunk entirely in Western savagery. The men of her own race dress in a manner that befits their means, by day and by night. An exact reflection of the way they have used their talents and opportunities in the world. A rich and powerful man allows himself the pleasure of appearing as such before his neighbors, and a beggar sticks to his proper rags. There are no jumped-up paupers in spats there, I can tell you.

We had the *Shah Jehan* band reorganized and slightly subsidized, to play during dinner every evening. A pleasant interlude. I should be quite content to pass several avatars, in a comfortable ship, off Goa.

There is nothing so pleasant as life at sea—sufficiently near to an interesting port, like Goa.

The evening after the last interview with the port authorities, when they came to dinner and gave us our new papers in person, we had a great jollification. We were then the *Mumatz Begum*, you know, and our previous papers were destroyed in their presence. Bless you, they didn't mind us changing our name; change it every day if you like; people who give nice fat fees and good dinners are entitled to their little eccentricities. Those authorities became very, very sentimental over the liqueurs and cigars. Combined effects of our lady's eyes and Collares Tinto, I fancy. They sang sweetly together, a little too obviously in the lady's direction, perhaps, about "*passionata seranata y amorata*."

To keep them in countenance, we sang,—

"Many a night I've spent with many a mermaid,"  
and,

"Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust

If the sharks don't get you, the mermaids must"—

We turned the pathos full on at the bits about the sharks and the ashes. Our guests were delightfully harrowed and went down the side to the tune of "*Dustia y dustia*."

Poor Casmyth, that song! His dear love is a mermaid now, if ever there was one. What is that strange thread in the pattern of our lives that is more characteristic of us than the whole of the rest of the stuff of it put together?

Indians try to unravel the thread by contemplating their navels in profound abstraction, for days together. The ego-ness of myself!

The last time I heard that song was when we were wrecking the home of Casmyth's beloved mermaid. He touched the tip of his ear—and that was the end.

One evening it was cool enough to let Mrs. Casmyth get out a gorgeous fur coat without appearing ostentatious. She was happy then! Russian sables, brought over the top of the world, and down through Afghanistan to a little Eastern princess who had heard an American college girl speak of the thing.

If only the weather had kept cool enough at night, she might—and we might still be happy down there somewhere, in that paradise for yachtsmen. I doubt it, though; that Cruiser would have nosed us out, sooner or later. During a hot spell of three successive tepid nights, we decided to turn north for a change of temperature, and because we wanted to confuse our trail as the transformed *Mumatz Begum*, or the other way round, the transformed *Ranee*. There were other reasons, and a curious one amongst them, as I shall tell you.

We still had a lot of opium left, and we sent a good parcel ashore one evening with Rahzan and the serang, just to satisfy the swarm of little dealers who had come to Goa at the news of the receipt of the first consignment there. Those fellows all work hand in glove with each other, their interests are all dovetailed together like bits of a Chinese puzzle—big piece to little piece—big man to little man—and little to lesser. Our trouble was that the whole of the lesser fry seemed to have been mishandled by the big men, who had set up their own lines of retail disposal, and were reaping all and every form of profit. They would pay dearly for that in India later, as everyone knows. Trusts and combines have no place there. I do believe that the surest way of eradicating opium in India would be to form a large efficient Trust for its delivery to the people, by some ridiculously bloated company, lost to all sense of fair play, and capable of squeezing the life out of every honest man who hap-

pened to be in a little way of the opium business. You would then see non-cooperation "bust" that trust in a week. You would see 300,000,000 people stand so solidly together that steam-rollers would do no more than flatten them on the ground they stood on. But of course I am not serious, I mean I am not making a comparison between the West and the East. Only an illustration of the Eastern defective business sense. That's all!

We fobbed the lesser fry off with a dole. So they went away, the whole crowd of them, satisfied for the time being. But I know the breed of lesser fry all the world over, they would come back, more insistent in their requests than ever. And after that there would be demands, not requests.

That crowd made us feel a little sensitive about the hospitality we had been enjoying so long. So taking one thing with another, we decided it would be a pleasant thing for all concerned if we took a trip to sea for a bit.

I can't help thinking that some of the Goanese were not so sensitive as we were. Or else it was some of those rapacious little traders, nursing some fancied slight of their claims at the hands of Rahzan. Perhaps it was a bit of both. There was treachery at Goa, I am certain of that.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### BIJAPORE, A CITY OF THE DEAD

There was no apparent hurry so we looked in at Marma-Goa, and then we cruised on to that port just N.W. of Dharwar, what's its name—beginning with a V—bother! it was on the tip of my tongue just now, Vishanayah, some such name as that. I have no map handy and there is no mention of it in my log. Whatever the name of the place was, we decided to use it, as a red herring, trailed across the track of the *Mumatz Begum* on her way south from Goa. Being a good deal north it was suitable, as you will admit. We wished the whole countryside to know that we were bound steadily north, and when they did know it, we meant to turn south in the night and “beat it” for Singapore.

To make sure that the populace were thoroughly posted in our movements (false), we arranged an excursion to Bijapore, sumptuously conducted in all its details, in expensive motors obtained with ostentation from Hubli, the nearest British center. We knew that Hubli would inform Bombay of the arrival of such important visitors; in time, when they had confirmed all the rumors coming in from native sources in every conceivable garbled form. Our movements were consistent, on an established northern route. But there was no hurry. Bombay is hundreds of miles from Bijapore, so we did some sightseeing, and Casmyth did some sketching of palaces and temples. He gave me

some, which I sent to Calcutta from Vishanayah, and that was the worst blunder I ever made in my life. It was the one thing needed to link us up to the old *Ranee*, and of course the C.I.D. got hold of the package, opened it, and found Casmyth's name on the sketches, and my notes and dates on the back. We might have escaped imprisonment but for that. I have those sketches still. I wouldn't take a million dollars for them. There are about seven hundred palaces at Bijapore, all exquisite examples of an exquisite period of architecture, I am told. I can well believe it, though the palaces themselves are so lovely they make you rub your eyes as you look at them. They seem far too exquisite to be true. If there is a puff of wind they must float away like large soap-bubbles, you think. Yet they have stood for hundreds of years, empty, and perfect in every detail. For just proportion, ingenuity of construction, and propriety of enrichment, there is nothing in the world to touch, or even approach the seven hundred palaces and temples of Bijapore. Seven hundred different designs of a distinction almost equal to that of the Parthenon, and of far richer and more skilled craftsmanship.

Champanir overwhelms you with its wonders, resounding chants of Thoric deeds and days. Bijapore wrings your heart like a death-dividing melody straight from the pipes of Pan.

In this lyric of architecture there is a tiny passage of comic relief. A funny modern jazzy passage. The man who looks after the seven hundred masterpieces lives in one palace and goes to his bathroom in another, over an acid-red machine-made brick archway!

That poor man does his work well, the monuments are in perfect order,—but it must be *malgré lui*! I couldn't help wondering what he would use in Ellora.

Probably corrugated iron. That would go well in the Poet's Dream of a City cut in the living rock.

We wandered at large the first day, looking down the perspective of civilizations dead and gone. Endless wonders on either hand. The Malik-i-Maidan, the Lord of the Plains, a wire-wound 12-inch gun of the fifteenth century. I dare not mention its incredible length.

Wire-wound rubbish, you say! they couldn't draw steel wire in those days, they had not the necessary power. All right, if you are going to quibble about power I will change the subject. The wire is certainly rather thick. But the internal rifling is there, obtained by building up the gun with wedges the full length of the gun, and that is a tip I give to all makers of naval armaments, free. You only have to assemble the core of your big gun on a system of helical wedges, bind it up with wire, just as you do now, and the trick is performed. And think of the perfection of the tempering you would get in the core! Well, you can't give good sense away; people won't look at anything unless they have to pay fabulous sums for the privilege. I charge a few dollars only, so no one will steal my ideas.

Who can describe the Mehta Mahal and the Juahmah Masjid and the Gol Gumbaz, and the Ibrahim Roza? Only St. Chrysostom could attempt such epic utterance. And the Palace of Aurungzebe, lined with pure gold from floor to ceiling, with the latter as high as the vault of a mighty cathedral! The gold still clings to the crevices of the walls, for your picking if you are that sort of person. Shivaji, the terrible Mah-ratta chief, the scourge of the mountains, descended one dark night with his hordes of fierce warriors and looted the palaces, stripped them of all except the poems wrought into the fabric of the walls—

the chiseled music of those lovely architectural operas.

Let me speak of the *Ibrahim Roza* and I will promise never to mention architecture again. I need not, architecture speaks for itself louder and clearer than all the amplifiers that will ever be thought of. Every word, every action, every thought that occurs in New York today is scrawled across her buildings, for those to read who have the secret. Soon all will know it. Certain skyscrapers will that day tremble to their very foundations, and the discreet guardians of the city will remove them by night.

Some, I say, not all.

Some are built in a measure of beauty and truth.

These will remain for a brief space.

The Ibrahim Roza of Bijapore is the twin wonder of fairy domes beside a lovely lake; gone are the waters now, where the lotus bloomed, like fair Ophelia's hands, pink-tipped and waxen-white.

One of the domes crowned the King's own tomb, facing the King's palace. Lordly life and still more lordly death, for alas the Eastern tradition that all are equal in death had fallen into disrepute, and for that reason the end was at hand. The tomb is greater than the palace. How different were the tombs of the great King's forefathers, tiny shallow stones, humble reminders of death, the humbler even of Kings.

Look daily on thy tomb!

That great King looked, but saw only more pomp in death than in his life. His son was the last of his line, and the son buried the great King in the Palace of Royal Death.

The King's son came to the throne, and designed for himself an even greater panoply of death. "The tomb of my father I cannot excel," said he, "for in all the

world there is nothing so fair, yet will I excel. Call together all the greatest architects of the realm!"

And they were summoned to the presence.

And the young king said:

"Listen! oh, ye architects, famed for skill and competence through all the world, build me a tomb that shall exceed in size all the tombs ever wrought by the hand of man; I care not what its proportions be, for the tomb of my father cannot be surpassed in those things, only let my tomb surpass in the magnitude of its dome all the domes that now aspire to touch the sky. Selah!"

So it was done. Slowly, the mightiest dome ever wrought, through all time, rose like a vast mountain against the sky. Scale, proportion, beauty, all were forgotten in making it the mightiest, and so it remains to this day: perfect in immensity.

Then was Bijapore laid waste forever, and so likewise it remains to this day. Yet the destroyer spared the monuments, while he put all living things to the sword. So has not one stone been moved from that time, save by the hand of God, the force of gravity.

Go to the Gol Gumbaz. Mount to the gallery near the base of that stupendous heaven-like vault, and see the catafalque of the last King, below; tall columns seeming like rows of gilded pins beneath you, far, far, below. Little flies move around the columns, these are men.

Speak a word above a whisper, and it will be repeated in your ears, clearly, unceasingly, until you can leave the monument, hurrying away with the sound of your own careless word in your ears.

Tap a message with your fingernail, on the marble-like plaster of the parapet of the gallery, and a friend on the far side, scarcely visible, will, in a moment, repeat the message exactly.

How were such wonders built—some secret of compounding cement of a strength greater than that produced by the skill of our wisest scientists? Partly,—but first a race of poets dreamed of them, then they passed into the hearts and minds of a cultured and spiritual people, that spiritual quality prompted them to attempt the uttermost that man may achieve. There are no such poets now, no, nor is that spirit any longer on earth.

## CHAPTER XXV

### TRAPPED IN THE RED SEA

Soon after we left Bijapore, Rahzan, that hardy warrior and staunch comrade, passed on his way to—other avatars.

In our absence he had reveled and drunk deep, as was his custom when no pressure of adventure or duty compelled him to sobriety. One morning he was brought on board by some coolies who had fished him out of a tank in the town, where he had fallen in his abysmal cups. Fever and pneumonia he could not out-wit; if such had been possible that bold spirit would have achieved it. A cabin was quickly turned into a sick-ward and we nursed him in turns, till the end. Rahzan died in my watch. Just before he died he signaled to me for paper and a pen, and his last act was to make a map, roughly, on the back of my passbook (all the paper I could find about me)—the map of the route to that fabulous treasure of the Great Thar, the treasure that my friend and I were nearly to lose our lives in finding, treasure which you may go and seek yourself if you will. It is there, I have seen it.

I doubt if any man will bring more away than we did, and that was exactly—nothing.

So died Rahzan, with a smile on his lips, his death-rattle sounding in his throat, like his habitual chuckle over some barbed jest. So die all truly brave men, merrily, as they live.

After our halcyon days amongst the glories of Bija-pore, the ship seemed a little—trivial? no, what, then? unsatisfying, perhaps, for all its comfort and graceful luxury. Perhaps it was due to the first complete escape from the sordid associations of the traffic we had engaged in on that ship. That threw our acts and the consequences inherent to such acts into high relief. Be that as it may, we were all unusually sad and silent as we returned on board, a sadness that was deepened by the death of our old comrade.

On the night of his death, soon after his body had been committed to the sea that he had loved, we turned on our heel and ran due south. I was restless all that night, tossing sleeplessly in my bunk. As the ship slowed to half-speed and swung around on her new course, I sat up in bed and said aloud, "Now what? What has destiny in store for me, for my friends!" My restlessness would not be mastered, and drove me at last to go up on deck, to look across the dark seas flying past the side of the quivering ship.

The wind of our speed was cold, yet lifeless. An oppressive sense of calamity seemed to pervade the dark wet empty decks. Each shadow seemed imbued with the malevolent presence of an impalpable adversary. All the ship was shrouded in quivering shadow. We were running without lights.

I clutched my thin dressing-gown around me as I shivered, touching the companionway, wet with the night moisture and the spray of our headlong flight.

Our flight had begun.

A profound conviction of impending disaster weighed down my spirit, and the wind moaned a confirmation amongst the shadows, like voices in unison from the shadowy ones in their crouching places along the dark deserted decks.

Slowly and sadly I returned to my bed, and near

dawn fell into a troubled sleep, dreaming that Siva fought with Vishnu, that he might tear the veil from Brahma's face while he destroyed us.

We were happy enough at breakfast, the morning sun drove my terrors of the night into the background that breeds such thoughts. Oh! youth,—preserve thy background inviolate! So mayest thou ever face a future unpeopled with the dark shapes of evil creeping past and before thee, from the night of thy own despair!

During breakfast the quartermaster on the bridge sent a message to Casmyth, that “a ship of importance” was on our quarter.

“What sort of ship?” said my friend.

“A large ship even as this ship, sahib.”

“All right, I'll go up and have a look presently.”

“Nothing in sight that I can see,” said Casmyth when he returned from the bridge, “some coastal craft making for Ceylon, I expect,” so we all fell to making plans over the charts on the saloon table. I was anxious to bring up my old proposal, Madagascar or Mozambique, as soon as possible. Yet I did not know where to begin.

Mrs. Casmyth herself gave me my chance, in this way, speaking to me as I looked in an abstraction at our racing wake through the stern windows of the saloon.

“Mr. Warburton, why don't you want to go to Singapore?”

“I never said so.”

“No, but it is quite evident, just the same.”

“Well, since you press the matter, I don't believe it is safe to sell the ship at Singapore.”

“Why not?”

“Singapore is practically a naval base, they are in touch with Bombay all the time.”

"And Madagascar?"

"Is French."

"Oh, I see."

"Let me explain the matter as I see it. I know you look upon Kenya as comparative exile, but we needn't stay there more than a year. Just long enough for us all to say we have been shooting elephants, or exploring would be better; that puts us all in a proper light, enables us to cut away from—from everything we wish to close down. You see what I mean?"

"Yes, that must be done."

"It will be more than an interesting visit; the people of the colony are very broad-minded, and amusing—hospitable, too; I know they are people of good family, mostly—I'm sure, etc., etc." So I drew a pleasant picture, chiefly from my imagination, of a place I only knew by hearsay—but I effaced the anticipation of complete exile; finally, I don't know why, I said it was a very healthy place for children.

"Oh," and profound reflection.

"Now," I thought, "I've put my foot in it properly."

But I had not, it turned the trick.

She got Casmyth out of the saloon by some married woman's invisible suasion, and when they came back, Casmyth said to me,

"That idea of yours, about exploring, it's darned good."

"Quite. I knew you would see that."

"We can refit at Singapore, going round by Madras, and get rid of all our remaining stuff before we reach Singapore."

That seemed the best I could do at the time, though I hated that Singapore part. I would have to wait a little and dig in as I went along.

"Quite, and how do I get back to Calcutta?"

"You don't get back, old man, you stay with us, and come to Kenya."

"I must decline."

"In the name of heaven, why?"

"I must."

"All right, then we won't go to Kenya, that's flat."

"Why?"

"Because we don't want you to leave us, and what is more, you shan't."

"No, Mr. Warburton, we won't, and you shan't," said the lady.

"Oh, well, if you put it like that."

"We do put it like that."

And so it was all arranged. And just as it was so excellently settled a messenger came from the bridge, "A ship in sight again, in our wake, captain sahib."

"All right, I'll go up in a second."

"I'll come with you."

On the bridge Casmyth took his binoculars and focussed them on our wake, and suddenly thrust them into my hand, saying,

"What do you make of that, quick!"

"The Cruiser!"

"Not a doubt of it."

"Steaming every knot she knows."

"Headed off again, those Goanese swine must have telegraphed to Bombay and the Cruiser has been down here all the time we were at Bijapore."

"Well, we have only one chance, we must run as we go, till dark and then wheel N.W. for Aden, for fuel. Oh! why, why, have we no wireless?"

"Can't be helped, it might do us more harm than good; what chance have we of beating them to Aden?"

"A day, perhaps thirty hours ahead, if nothing happens."

"Can't we speed up a bit?"

"I'll speak to the chief."

So began the race that ended in disaster in the Red Sea, a greater disaster than losing a dozen ships. But that belongs to a later part of my narrative. It's no use galloping Pegasus to death, that is a Cockney way of riding. Gentlemen will dismount and lead a good horse down the steepest places, and so will I, with gallant Pegasus. He has been a good horse to me; he is carrying me now straight back to my true love, upon whose beauty I have not set eyes these twelve months. Besides, you always ought to keep a bit in hand, for the Avenue. So said that wise horseman, my father, God rest his soul! He also said to me on one occasion, coming behind me at a double oxer, "Go on, my boy! Money couldn't buy a ride like this!" There is a time to forget even discretion.

If our engines had been fixed properly in a dock-yard the first time they broke down near Devibunder, I believe we might have escaped the worst disaster. But it was not so appointed. All that day we stayed on the bridge, my friend and I. Mrs. Casmyth came up occasionally, but her husband was curt, preoccupied, so she soon went down to the saloon again. We left her alone a great deal, I am afraid, from the moment that disastrous race began. Personally, I never gave a thought to the consequences of such an exclusion, yet it produced the worst disaster of all.

We prayed for a misty night, just part of one would do, the first part of the night. Our prayers were granted, the mist thickened about ten o'clock, and by eleven we had completely lost the lights of the Cruiser.

Whether she followed further I do not know. Nor is it a matter of great importance. Merely outrunning our pursuer was pointless. We had to keep the secret of our full speed from the Cruiser, to drop them with

several knots to spare, while still appearing to be going full out. That is why we prayed for the mist. That kept them in the dark regarding the exact destination we were aiming at, also the time of our arrival. Our destination was not south, that is all they knew, and it was a great deal.

Three courses were open to us the moment we dropped the pursuer, with enough in hand for a gallop up the straight: a bold dash at once into Bombay and a quick double-back to the southern trail for Madagascar; a long drive up the Gulf of Oman for Karachi, with the possibility of hiding indefinitely in the lost world bordering the Rann of Kutch; and, the last shot in the locker, hide and refuel in the Gulf of Tajura, the French settlement opposite Perim. We dare not go to Aden for fuel again. We had to decide at once; Bombay was on our starboard quarter as we debated the matter. Fuel is scarce and hard to come by in the greatest shipping center of the East. When the world at large learns of the oil-pipe scandal there, that squandered *lahks* and *lahks* of rupees and produced not one drop of oil for shipping, practically available, then it will hold its sides and laugh immoderately. It was no laughing matter for us, but there was one advantage in the matter, it reduced our indecision to two possibilities, the Great Rann or the Gulf of Tajura. If we tried the former we might be halfway there when we were headed off, with more than half our fuel gone. That would be the end of us without the slightest loophole of escape.

So it was Perim and Tajura for us. Fuel we had to have inside ten days. It took us five days to make Tajura, and we ran every night without lights, taking every risk that seafaring knows. Casmyth and I had our meals brought up to us in the chart-house, and we slept where we dropped. The whole of our energies

were directed to one end, to get to Tajura sufficiently ahead of our estimated time of arrival, so that we would have a sporting chance of refueling for the flight to South Africa. Think what that means! Apart from a week without sleep, each morning the sickening suspense in the gray of another dreadful day, straining with bloodshot eyes for the first sign of the pursuer. We were determined to get the oil in thirty hours at Tajura. So we drove the ship through a nightmare week.

Here I must mention the gallant behavior of the crew of the *Mumatz Begum*, a gallantry which wiped out of our minds forever their equivocal behavior at Allahbunder. The serang came to us on the third night of our headlong flight and offered the services of the entire crew for the stokehold, as reliefs.

Think of that! Asiatic deck aristocrats for the soul-shattering dangers among whirling steelafrits in the dark bowels of the ship! It is impossible to convey to you in mere words a hundredth part of the gallantry of that offer. I shall not attempt it. There were tears in Casmyth's eyes as he clasped the old serang's hand and stammered out his thanks, and declined.

The offer was quite impossible, of course, they would only have been in the way. But the comradely thought warmed our hearts in our worn-out bodies. We turned our haggard eyes toward the darkness ahead, with a little less chill from the cold fears of apprehension. Fugitives we might be, but some men in the world bore us a little regard, a little manly esteem. It was nearly as good, as bracing, as real self-respect, without which life is a hollow mockery. With it, life is always a gallant adventure, even to the edge of utter disaster, and beyond it.

Bearded, haggard and dropping with fatigue we sighted the coast of Africa on the fifth day of our

ran in to the shelter of the Gulf of Tajura, about twenty-five miles S.E. of Perim, running as close in as we dared, to take every advantage of a background confusing our ship's silhouette; confusing, that is, on the seaward side, where our danger lay.

In broad daylight I set off again for our agent in Aden. There was no other alternative. There is a time to be even indiscreet. I took every cent of specie we had on board, a big sum, and jewels enough to ransom a rajah. Yet I knew that money alone would not achieve our purpose if once we were suspected of being fugitives from justice. There is no more law-abiding, law-respecting community in the world than the Parsee race. Law and order to them are necessities as vital as the very elements, the earth that supports all men, the water that increaseth the fruits of the earth to all honest men, the fire that consumeth the evil of all things, and the air that taketh unto itself at the last all noble spirits.

I had to play on a rather wooden man's nature, delicately, firmly, as Kreisler plays and produces from a wooden instrument any effect he wants.

There must be no hint of the reason for our desperate haste—and I must pay just enough to stir my man's latent capacity to the uttermost limits of its powers of production. To offer too much in reward for such service would be fatal.

There must be lengthy debate when every second seemed like dropping pearls, besides the sufficient display of avarice. Above all, I must command where I was constrained by all circumstance to beg favors.

Business in the East is a good school for perfecting a technique in finesse. I succeeded,—as far as the Parsee agent was concerned. But it took practically all the

ready money we had to achieve my object, the much-desired fuel. It was to be ready for us the next evening, to be towed to a spot five miles south of Perim, at first fall of night. The agent would not look at the jewels and I knew better than to press such a point.

A completely unexpected factor brought all my skill in affairs to nought. In the gathering dusk next evening, a gunboat hove in sight from the S.W., just as the first steel lighter came alongside. Before we had cast off the lighter another showed up from the S.E. We were trapped as completely as rabbits in a burrow with ferrets after them. We could not run anywhere except to the end of our burrow, north up the Red Sea.

So we ran, and I knew the end was at hand.

The steam had never been allowed to sink very far in the gauges, most of our fires had been kept going, although we knew the appalling danger of fuelling under such conditions. Nevertheless there is a time for such risks as that. Amongst all our other risks, it seemed insignificant.

There remained enough fuel for four days' running under forced draught,—four and a half say, to a dead stop. We could make Suez, with a chance of getting to Port Said overland, and then disappear into Europe. Asia was too hot to hold us any longer, Asiatic civilization, that is.

Alternatively, we could run for Jebel Zukker, scuttle the ship behind the island, and disappear into the heart of Arabia. We still had a few friends there—lawless nomads like ourselves—unscrupulous raiders. Doubling back was over; we had come to the end of our tether in that line. Moreover, we would be expected to make the full run of the Red Sea, like the frightened rabbits we were. Go to ground at once, then, and let the chase run past us, though that was more like a hare.

It was the only scheme. Hare and rabbit, then, slip behind Jebel Zukker, scuttle the ship, and strike across the Arabian desert to Oman.

The whole maneuver turned upon a quick start and a superhuman drive of nearly two hundred miles to give us a chance to effect a landing. We might be sunk by gunfire outside Aden, but the dark night was our last shield, the last hope of scoundrels—harried, rabby, wretched creatures.

The wind and sea were rising rapidly; that would hold up our pursuers, and there would be no moon.

“Drive, oh, drive! and run her under,” said Casmyth with the despair of utter weariness. So we drove in the gathering gloom, that could never be as dark as the gloom in our hearts. Lightless, desperate, defeated, so we ran before the powers of justice at the last. Aden made no sign as we dashed at full speed through the narrows. The night had begun auspiciously—but it could have only one end. That Cruiser had gauged our speed to a few miles when she put those gunboats on our trail.

Swinging into the Red Sea, with the gunboats just in sight, we knew we could not beat them and they knew it, too. I don’t think they tried to overhaul us. The morning would see us snared by the neck in our own burrow. They only needed to keep us running in front of them. Once we caught their signals flashed across the dark sky behind us, “Keep Arabian side, we take Egyptian!”

The whole ship’s company was worn out before we started the last stretch. Casmyth sagged at the weather cloth, with his arm around a bridge stanchion. I could stand no longer, and lay full-length in the chart-house, fighting with sleep. Late that night the chief engineer staggered aft, up the bridge companion, and fell into a corner of the chart-room lockers. He said he could

drive his men no longer. Casmyth raised his hand to strike him, and I managed to fling myself between them. Together we fell in a heap on the chart-room floor. Casmyth had the chief by the throat and was hoarsely whispering,

"Get back to your work, you hear me, get back!"

"Let the man alone, for God's sake!" I said.

"You go to hell!"

Together they rolled, fighting feebly, into a corner of the chart room—then they rolled apart, fast asleep. This seems almost incredible, but it is true.

We had all reached the end of our fighting.

I could do no more, soon I must sleep, too.

Then the old serang was shaking me by the shoulder—had I slept? No!—impossible! there were the two fighters, face down on the floor. "What's that! Whasay!"

"Sahib! Sahib! Give an order!"

"Gerow lemme sleep!"

"Give an order, O Sahib, lest the helmsman see our plight."

"No use."

Violent shaking, and I grappled the shaker in a lust to be still, just a moment—a minute—"Well—what, then—old faithful?"

"Sahib, I waken captain, sahib."

"Eh, how?"

"*Malmalah.*"

"*Malmalah?*"

"*Atcha*, sahib, little grains."

It was a desperate trick, I had seen it done, and seen it fail; it all depends on how it is done. The serang ran off to the saloon and came back shaking like a leaf, as if he had seen a ghost—What had he seen—they were always seeing something, those damned Asiatics! something nobody in their senses

wants to see—God! why can't the old fool leave us alone in peace—what's wrong now?

"*Mem-sahib, ne thik*" ("lady is ill").

"Well, we're all *ne thik*, give me the *malmalah*!"

Together we roused the chief and my friend, pouring whiskey down their throats, neat, and propping them up in the wind above the weather cloths, with their mouths open. The wind of our speed did the rest. The chief looked dazedly around, and once at Casmyth who was swearing hoarsely as he rubbed his smarting eyes, and then lurched below to drive his crazy crew again. I went below, how I know not, to the saloon for more whiskey. I had to switch the lights on to find the stuff.

Mrs. Casmyth lay dead-drunk across the saloon table. I thought it was some awful apparition, and remembered the twittering serang. Her head and the upper part of her body were covered with her fur coat as she lay stretched out among the bottles.

She must have been drinking steadily all day.

We had never even given her a thought!

"Oh, God! what will become of us!" I said, shaking her roughly. She only muttered, "Oh! Stanley! Stanley!"—and fell forward on the table again.

Blindly I groped my way back along the dark decks toward the bridge—pulling myself along by the weather rails—Wait! something is coming! Ah! dear God, what's that!!!

All over!

A rending crash, the ship shuddered vehemently, a devil's tattoo of gigantic hammers on metal, then with a roar of escaping steam the engines came to dead stop.

Slowly, as the noise of the steam died out, the ship ran up into the weather, and I knew my friend was back at his post. Then pandemonium broke loose as the crew realized that we had broken down, and the

stokehold people swarmed up from below and out of the engine room.

This was the one thing Casmyth needed to rouse him, he was down the companion in a bound and amongst that shrieking mob yelling in each other's faces about their scalds and wounds. He disappeared in the brown for a moment and emerged with the two largest and noisiest stokers, dragging them to the boat winches by their devil-locks.

"Get two more, old man, for the next boat aft, and switch on the deck lights."

I plunged in and seized a pair, running them aft before they knew what I was about, and soon we had all the boat davits manned and ready to swing out.

"Now, if any man lifts so much as a finger without my order henceforth, I will tear his throat out with these two hands!" shouted our Captain, shaking his hooked fingers as he paced down the trembling line of cowed men. The words they did not understand; the gesture they could not mistake. No man could.

The boats were all ready to be launched on the dark sea, orderly, quietly, securely; then each boat's crew was allowed to fall out, down one side to their quarters for their dunnage, and up the other to the boats, a minute or two allowed each batch. When the boats were all down and strung out astern, except the launch on the starboard, for the after guard,—

"Switch off all lights!" shouted Casmyth.

"All out!" I shouted back, presently.

I went round the ship with the chief engineer to put those lights out, and I shall think to my dying day I heard a moan and a splash of water on the dark port side. Did I hear it, or did I imagine it, conjure it up out of that horrible nightmare of memories, afterwards? I don't know.

I meant to keep the last bitter truth from my friend,

somehow, if I could; he would find his wife in the launch; I would help her up and say she had fallen asleep with fatigue.

"Chief, open all port cocks, I will attend to the starboard side," said Casmyth.

"Get my wife, and all our kit into the launch, old man, while I am below scuttling the ship; we haven't much time now." The ship was settling rapidly, there would be little need of scuttling.

"Right." I groped my way below. No use making a scene, get everything else ready first and into the launch, and then watch my chance for—what? the chance to smuggle a drunken woman up the ship's rail and into the launch. It would not be difficult, she would not struggle, and she was as light as a feather. All set.

I could not find her!

When Casmyth came up from below we raced round and round that dark sinking ship. My friend yelled for the lights, but it was too late, the engine room was flooded already.

She was not on board.

It is my belief she managed to get on deck alone, soon after she was roused by the noise of the smashing machinery, and making her way to the port side after all the boats were gone, climbed to a swinging davit, and fell into the sea. We found her scarf near the companionway of the saloon. We dropped the launch from the davits and searched the sea in the dark; it was hopeless. The ship was settling rapidly now, a question of moments before she plunged. We never saw my friend's wife again.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### OPEN BOATS AGAIN

We made Zukker early the next morning, all the boats towed behind the launch, and rowing to ease the strain. We could not afford to have any straggling, better all be caught than have one silly boat's crew landing helpless away down the coast, among our enemies. On the landward side of the island we were as completely hidden as if we were already in the heart of the Arabian desert.

My friend listened in a daze to my stumbling, incoherent explanation of the illness of his wife, which had made me leave her to the last moment. I do not know whether he blames me for her death or not. I do not know whether he suspects the truth, about that indisposition.

We never mentioned the subject again from that day to this.

The ship's boats were all scuttled in deep water behind the island, all except the launch. All hands were paid off as soon as they were sufficiently recovered from their wounds and burns. None died, though many will bear to their graves the marks of that night's work. Each man received a liberal present, enough to make him a rich man for the rest of his life, in his own country, if he had the sense to stop there. Then we arranged their departure in small groups in the launch, or in Arab dhows, to French territory opposite Perim,

whence they could easily make their way back to their own place, and no one the wiser.

The chief engineer stayed behind a few days, tuning up the launch (he loved such intricate fiddling), and to get us a good supply of gas for the engine. Then he, too, went his way.

We never saw anything more of the gunboats. Perhaps they, too, turned back after creating the effect they desired. They knew that the desert would get us on either hand, or Suez at the end of our burrow. A steam-hammer does not get excited about a rat running in and out between its mighty jaws. Rats, rabbits, hares, thieves, scoundrels, wretches,—I have only one more simile left—for our subsequent actions in that avatar. You must guess it yourself,—presently.

The serang alone declined to leave us, chiefly because of his pity for the state of mind and body my friend had fallen into, a lethargy of spirit that threatened his reason and his life. He spoke rarely and wandered alone by the seashore on the seaward side of the island, daily and nightly. My knowledge of the cause of his sorrow made my company distasteful to him, I think. I was glad he allowed the serang to follow behind him wherever he went. I had never mentioned the fact that the serang brought me the first news of our last and greatest disaster, and the serang was a man of penetration, as you know. With such a companion my friend could not come to much harm, in his endless wandering, looking out to the sea that he had served so gallantly all his life, and which had defrauded him of his dear treasure in the end. Yet there was something arrogant about that servitude, he had been a Janissary of the sea, you know. Poseidon demands humble allegiance from his servitors.

With the departure of the ship's company, our situa-

tion at Zukker was no longer delicate. We might have stayed at Zukker for the rest of our days, but I began to fear for my friend's reason while he remained in her vicinity. He was obsessed by the thought that the woman he had loved so ardently was still, in a sense, capable of needing and appreciating his affection. I gathered this from the few disjointed words he let slip on the rare occasions he came in to share a meal with me. Perhaps he was right, who can tell? but that way madness lies. We had to get out of Zukker, out of the vicinity of that lovely woman, who was as alluring in death as in life, potent to bind spells about the reason of men. But what power could enable me to achieve my purpose?

I had to rouse my friend somehow. All day long I beat my brains to that end, but day followed day without a solution, or a hint of one, to that problem.

They were days of sorrow and remorse, for both of us. My thoughts went out to Viroschand, the comrade whose confidence we had abused, ruthlessly pressing him into our service to attain our selfish ends. Yet I felt that he was no longer anxious about us; in some indefinable way I felt that. Such convictions are inexplicable, but they are entirely convincing when suffering has made us sufficiently sensitive to permit them to invade our consciousness with adequate security of reception.

During those weeks of hiding I realized to the full the meaning of Viroschand's first words on the subject of our enterprise, in that great Gothic office in Calcutta, "Sahibs, I see that your minds are set on this thing." He never intruded his own mind in regard to our shady, raffish employment. He knew that the settled determination of a Western mentality is as dangerous to itself as the fine indecisions of his own countrymen are to them. I even went so far as to think

that he foresaw the end of the whole wretched business. But that is impossible, of course. Quite.

Yet,—I don't know—in India?

Sometimes it seemed to me that we might have escaped, hardly, if we had waited for the mechanic for the auxiliary, as Viroschand so anxiously desired. It is true, you know, setting out without that mechanic was the real beginning of all our troubles; that is the plain fact, the explosion on the *Shah Jehan* would never have occurred but for that.

I had nothing else to do on that island but think, alone. I would work the thing over from an Eastern point of view, tacitly assuming that Viroschand was in possession, by means of some supernatural power, of every detail of our recent activities. There was some ground for such an assumption, you know; he never expressed the least surprise at hearing of our association with his sister, that amazing accidental encounter in the night, that could only have occurred to restless stirring men, like the coalescence of quicksilver particles moving round in a great bowl. Then I would work the matter over from a Western point of view, isolating facts, four-square, solid facts, moving only to an end in consonance with reason, right side up (down I mean) with only one right side, the basic motive. And then I would try to combine the two points of view.

Hopeless! Waste of time! Getting nowhere.

And all the time there was the sensation of Viroschand being very near, in sympathy, just as if he might look over my shoulder, at any moment. I could not, in that place, resort to my usual irritable incredulity, to escape the significance of such visitation, of such vision. I had nothing else to do but start thinking again as soon as the irritation leaked away. Activity of body, the Western cure for all forms of introspection, was lacking.

Perhaps Casmyth had similar thoughts to intensify his grief. In the Club at Calcutta, as we sat in the bar, the night we saw Viroschand off to Bombay, he had come to as complete a realization of the matter as I had. When he threatened to throw his master's ticket in the Hooglhi I knew it was not the impulse of a moment. A maiden's chastity is not more sacred than a ship-master's ticket, to the right sort of maiden and the right sort of master. Both may be sold if they are *not* sacred, for dirty money—to dirty men.

But I must get back to the events of my narrative.

Business is a wonderful corrective for excessive psychical curiosity. Vishnu has really ordered it so; if only Indians would take hold firmly of their proper knowledge of human philosophy they would be the first to admit it; Vishnu the Preserver, whose chief law is Order in All Things.

Every business man should have a replica of Vishnu in his office, for by strict order in all things are we alone preserved from damnation, from Siva the Destroyer, by day and by night, too.

The necessity for attending to practical business matters solved my worst difficulties then, as it always does in this earthly avatar.

We were running short of money, to be plain with you. That business brooked no delay, nor was it bothered by any psychical manifestations or philosophical consideration. Paying that Parsee agent for the last lot of fuel, which we never got, you remember, had nearly run us out. I had to use all our private resources to reward the crew, even Mrs. Casmyth's. We had to get money at once. That was not going to be easy. Perim was closed to us, and Aden closed, too. The Arabs had none to give us for our vast hoard of jewels.

We had to get to Suez somehow.

A thirteen-hundred-mile trip in an open launch, in

the Red Sea! Need I say more? Fortunately it was the cold season, which is to say that the temperature by day would not get much above a hundred, at the worst!

Well, it had to be done, and the sooner I got my friend roused and set about it in a responsible manner, the better for both of us. So I worked over the thing in my slow British way and laid my plans.

I started by first picking my friend's pocket that night. He came into tiffin the next morning, with the serang at his heels as usual. He flung himself into a deck-chair on our tiny veranda, merely nodding to me as I sat at the dining-table.

Now was my time.

Ah! the right word, or nothing.

"Casmyth."

"Well."

"Er—can you—could you possibly lend me a little money?"

"Certainly."

Much feeling in pockets, languidly at first—then brisker—then—

"Extraordinary thing."

"What is."

"I must have mislaid my pocketbook—serang!"

"*Atcha, sahib.*"

"*Rupee book kidder hi, tera tano?*"

"*Ne, ne, sahib*" (vehemently).

"Well, it must be in my kit, I'll go and search for it." He mooned about inside his room for a while, but soon things began to fly around. Coming back quite animated, he said, "It is nowhere to be found, I must have lost it. I am afraid I can't oblige you, but it does not matter here." (Signs of relapse into utter lassitude again.)

"Pardon, it does matter; if you can't find that money we're stumped."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say—I have none, either."

"But—but we have plenty of jewels, haven't we?"

"We have, but you can't eat emeralds, and the Arabs won't give us food for them, nor take them in payment for this shack. I paid out practically all our ready money for the last fuel, and the crew's wages."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"We must go to Suez and sell some stones."

"Impossible!"

"Absolutely necessary!"

This was the most delicate part of the business. I was afraid he might want me to go alone, or with the serang. I had to lash him.

"A necessity," I repeated, "that might never have arisen if you had not mooned about for weeks, losing your pocketbook, and everything else of worth about you."

"What!—what's that you say!"

"I say what is just, and plain fact. I have been paying our household expenses out of my own pocket all this time, and I can't go on any longer."

"Er,—I'm sorry, old man, why didn't you speak before? Of course we must get off to Suez at once."

Good enough, thought I; now I have only to hold him to that and the trick is turned.

"One other thing, here is the statement of account of our expenses up to date. I would like to have you examine it and check it, and put your signature to it, or alternatively, give me your note of hand for your share. Business is business, you know." (Was that too rough?)

"Certainly, I must apologize for my seeming indifference."

"Not at all! Some one has to keep things going, and you did not seem to think it was your business."

"But it was my business, you should have reminded me, old man."

"Well, well, let bygones be by—I remind you now, and I would take it as friendly if you will overhaul the launch soon; I know nothing about such matters, and you do." (This was a stretcher, but necessary.)

"Sure, I'll get at it at once, right away,—*serang! Jeldi jao!*"

"*Atcha, sahib, bote atcha!*"—jumping up and smiling at the old commanding rasp in his master's voice.

"Launch *muncta*."

"*Thik, sahib, thik,*"—running away to the creek where the launch was kept. And my friend was striding off like a roused lion as I rubbed my hands together at my oily diplomacy. Then he slowed up, stopped, with his hand fingering his chin weakly, coming back with the fire gone out of his eye—almost sheepishly he came into the little dark dining-room, and held out his hand.

"I am sorry—I've been incredibly selfish."

"Not at all" (this wouldn't do, he needed another good slash); "but if my loneliness in the past weeks means anything to you, as I believe you wish me to infer—please get that launch ready by tomorrow morning."

"Oh, my dear fellow! what's the matter with to-night, I should like to know?"

"All right with me,—*if* you can do it."

"Do it! rats! you ought to know me better than that!"

Hooray! he was off like a shot from a gun. Now I had got myself in a nice mess with my overacting. All the bungalow's affairs to clear up, servants to dismiss, bills to be haggled over—ask any woman what it means to leave a house for good, between lunch and dinner. But it had to be done. I was not returning to Zukker if I could prevent it.

By Gad! I had to jump to do it!

## CHAPTER XXVII

### TO PORT SAID WITH OUR BOOTY

We left Zukker shortly before midnight, and I have never seen the place since. Nor do I ever wish to do so. Nor does my friend, I fancy. He knows that the limit of human endurance, mental and physical, cannot be overstepped with impunity twice in one avatar. Casmyth is quite happily married now, and between ourselves, I expect to attend a quiet ecclesiastical ceremony at St. Thomas's on the Avenue, that will produce similar results in my own case. We write to each other at rather long intervals, and we exchange tales of our bad old days in the past. Sinners have the rare pleasure of charitably forgiving a joint fault, I don't know that the "unco' guid" have as much pleasure in confirming each other's virtues. Life is not all straight weft and woof, there is the pattern above it all. The Great Designer is noted for charity too, to the weavers of life's web, if they will humbly confess the faults they have made, in His pattern.

Now I must tell you of the last two adventures that brought my "Avatar in Vishnu Land" to a close: one, by sea, and a wreck at sea; one by land, and a wreck thereon likewise.

First, the sea, as always.

When we reached Suez after a hard, difficult journey of over thirteen hundred miles, full of danger and

suffering, for we ran by night mostly, or the early dawn, the first man I saw in a complete white suit of clean ducks with brass buttons, was—my naval acquaintance of the Cruiser!

I was wearing a big pith helmet, pulled down well over my eyes, and I do not know to this day whether he spotted me or not. Somehow, I think he did. I ducked down a side alley, up another and so on till I reached our little lodging, to warn Casmyth. Fortunately he was in when I ran panting up to the room. We had to leave Suez at once. That Cruiser must have been in the dockyard at Tewfik. There was no sign of her in the roads outside Suez when we arrived, nor had any warships come in since.

Our negotiations for the sale of a large portion of the jewels were nearly completed; in two days' time we were to hand them over and get our money.

Now we must run for our lives, or liberty at the least.

But how? We dare not take the launch through the Canal, and we dare not advertise ourselves by hiring a boat. Over land then, to Port Said.

Our resources were insufficient. We were down to annas.

The serang came to our aid; it seems that he had made the acquaintance in Suez of the friend of Razzan's, who had provided the boat for the Casmyths to go up the Canal on that foolhardy trip to Port Said when we were lying up in the Gulf of Akaba, disguising the *Ranee* the first time. This man was a boat-builder, he was willing to disguise our launch. It was worth trying, and he was willing to wait for payment of his services.

We had to become Parsee date-merchants of Tewfik, bound for Port Said, with a cargo of that ever-odorous merchandise. Not a safe character for us to adopt, but

the best we could do to account for our possession of the launch, and our proposed destination. The only passports we could get were of Parsees, so that settled it. The photos we had taken in Tewfik were hazy enough to be anyone, nearly. A few hours' exposure to the sun, and a spray of salt water did the rest. The boat-builder soon had our trim launch looking like a manure barge, and our costumes were ready by night-fall. We set off next morning in broad daylight to run the gauntlet of the Canal. It was useless to try by night, the Canal is watched too carefully from end to end then. By day, with luck and enough assurance, in which no Parsee is lacking, it might be possible.

Here is the saddest thing I shall have to record henceforth. The time had come to part from the serang. He could not travel in the launch with us; one glimpse of him in the company of Parsee date-merchants, and we were done. It was most sad because it had to be such a hurried parting. I shall not describe it.

The plans we had been making to go back all together to stand by our friend Viroschand were dashed to the ground. We must part now, forever.

The wealth we showered on the old man meant nothing to him. We had difficulty in making him take it. We picked the bag up from the ground time and again as he stood, silent, bowed down with grief, regretting his own capacity, the suggestion we had seized so eagerly, to leave him.

It was necessary to forbid him to come to the first Canal port, for his own sake as well as ours. Besides, we could not go through that suffering of parting twice. The end of such an encounter would simply be taking him on board, and,—prison for us all.

Farewell, old heart of gold! May Vishnu preserve

thee from all evil, till thy earthly avatar is consummated. In thy next, much honor and great responsibility awaits thee!

Farewell!

My acting was not good, but Casmyth could imitate the Parsee to the life. The artistic temperament, I suppose. But mine was good enough, as a poor assistant to a "Bundabust" of an owner, as most Parsees of substance are, roustabout, rattling, dashing, fellows. That was Casmyth's rôle. A yellow stain on face and hands, blackened eyebrows and lashes, and blue glasses helped us both. Me particularly; I was made as yellow as a guinea-fever, you know. That accounted for my silence.

A subordinate checked us through the entrance to the Canal, and we had about half a ton of stinking dates aboard to help him to hasten our departure. Our pallid faces and blue glasses did what Casmyth's incessant parrot talk left out of the picture. All Parsees, nearly, are myopic or ophthalmic. We were past Scylla, now for Charybdis! We were only stopped once, near the Bitter Lakes, and our cargo turned the trick again. Dates of nearly any age, in small quantities, are not unpleasant, but in large, oh, dear!

I shall never forget our first morning in the Canal. It was like gliding through liquid green jade. Casmyth got out his paint-box, a little thing about as big as a packet of cigarettes, his own invention, and did some sketching to while away the time. Dangerous work, as Parsee artists are rare anywhere, particularly in the Canal. He kept well under cover of our canvas cabin, and as I thought anything was better than a relapse into the mood of his Zukker days, I had not the heart to rebuke him. Between whiles we practised the Parsee sing-song chee-chee English. We arrived at Port Said on the second evening, late at night, and hung up out-

side till daylight should serve us as it did at Port Suez. There was no difficulty in the morning, a lot of big craft were waiting to come through the other way, and our trivial affairs were merely a nuisance. Our passports were not even looked at. Flicked open, stamped and,—buzz off!

Once past Port Said and Customs' officials, we felt like men new-born. Port Said has a liberating influence on all Westerners passing westward.

I don't know why, but it is so. Once on the right side of the coaling stations opposite the Port Offices, a lift comes to the heart. "Heart up!" says the exile from the East, "the years have been long and weary, regret has racked us sore and may do so yet, more acutely, but here's a holiday ahead, with kith and kin to help us spend it in cool places out of the black pall of the burning sun." "It's a poor heart that never rejoices," as my dear father used to say, as we left Port Said behind, watching de Lessep's monument sink into the desert horizon, from the stern rail of a home-bound steamer.

We found a quiet backwater with a rotting wooden quay overhanging the water, so we slipped under it in the cool of the morning, and tied up. We were tired of those stinking dates, and longed for a suitable opportunity and place to jettison them. When the last frail had been ripped open and dumped over the side, we swabbed everything down with strong carbolic soap, obtained from a junk shop near by, and a liberal sprinkling of gasoline within and without was as grateful to our long-suffering noses as the finest attar of the East.

Then we slept for nearly eighteen hours, from exhaustion and nervous strain. In the evening, we strolled about Port Said, practising our comic parrot English, and marking down suitable jewelers for our future business. Nearly everyone in the world has passed through Port

Said, or will soon, so I shall not describe more of it than is necessary to make the events of my narrative clear. The place is nearly indescribable in any case, the worst of the West and the East, carefully selected for vileness, and placed cheek by jowl.

On the third evening we took out a few sample jewels from our store, a large iron box, practically water-tight, which we let down by a rope into the mud below the launch. This rope we buoyed a few feet below the surface of the water level whenever we went ashore. The whole port is infested with thieves, of every nationality under the sun, and we always expected to find that the launch had been ransacked. Strangely enough, we were never molested. A compliment to the camouflage work of our friend at Tewfik, that. On this particular evening a few valuables were left scattered about, on purpose, under the canvas hood.

"Leave a few sprats on the surface, they will be too excited scoffing those to suspect the presence of the whale below," said Casmyth.

"Good idea, now are we all set?"

"All ship-shape, Limehouse fashion. Let's get off."

"So it is agreed that we are not to approach more than one merchant, under any circumstances."

"Yes, I think so; it would not be safe to make more than one deal in a place like this. If we don't hit on the right man at once, better get off to Cairo and begin negotiations anew. If we succeed in disposing of an eighth part of the lot here, we can get on a small steamer to take us to Valetta, and no questions asked about nationality at the shipping offices."

"And thence to Brindisi, I suppose."

"Yess—but why you not talk like one smart Parsee date-merchant?"

"Sorry—Oah yess, I am damfool forgetter, messing up all A-1 jewel biz."

"That's better,—It is great pleasure to meet you, Mister Warbai—that will be your name, old man, and mine Casmowji, near enough if we make a slip into our proper names."

"Casmiji is better."

"All right, Casmiji henceforth, and don't forget, Parsee gentleman's hat is not like uneasy conscience, up and down like jumping-jack box."

"Thanks are due to you, Mister Casmiji, you are one very thoughtful man and excellent friend."

"That's the style, keep it up at the interview, one bad slip might easily settle our hash; there's one thing in our favor, the jeweler will be a Jew, as elsewhere in the world,—I wonder why Jews and jewels cling so closely? It is not likely our man will have had much experience with Britishers or Parsees, so it is not so difficult if we are reasonably consistent in our behavior."

So we practised our patter as we walked along the damp narrow alleys, keeping off the main streets wherever we could. When we reached the raffish gardens in the center of the town, we turned off to the jeweler's quarter, to the house of a substantial-looking man marked down on the first night we looked around. We had rejected all the others in favor of Casmyth's first choice. The shop was not large, not a quarter the size of the *grands magasins* on the main boulevards but it looked like the headquarters of a really big man. You know the sort of thing I mean. Just a few fine stones on a cushion in the window. Everything else solid, expensive and unostentatious, and—an air of solemnity about everything.

Pausing a few seconds as we entered the doorway of the shop, I stepped out quickly again and looked up and down the narrow street—boldly—there was only one person in sight, an Arab, looking into a brightly

lighted shop window a few yards away. So we were not followed.

Casmyth was right. The merchant was a Jew, a truculent fellow who obviously thought Parsees very small fry. He blew smoke in our faces, and waved his flashing be-diamonded fat paws toward a pasty-faced son of Israel, oiled and curly above and below, and behind and before. That suited us, we weren't there to make gestures about our national importance, or personal importance either.

Casmyth opened up on the assistant with a few small emeralds, saying,—

"Please, mister, if you have esteemed interest for highly valuable stones of good preciousness we are in sound position to submit high-class sorts and kinds of same."

All spoken in a rather high sing-song gabble with much head-nodding and hand-flapping.

"Vot kinda stone you got?"

"Much of several," tipping the little emeralds on the counter.

"Vare you get dese ole stone? You got any more like dese?"

Tip a fair-sized emerald out,—sensation!—already.

"Vait, mister, vait, I get de boss!"

Coarse fat lips, and pendulous noses, nearly touching, hissing whispers in the corner near the door, and then the owner came over to us, making a mighty favor of it.

"Vell, vy don you show vot you got ven you come in de first time, hein?"

I will spare you the rest of the thieves' talk on both sides. A few more emeralds made his eyes bulge like goiters. He was staggered at the quantity and quality of our loot. That Jew's hands trembled so that he could scarcely hold the great magnifying-glass over the stones.

I wonder what he would have thought if he could have seen that iron box opened? Been the death of him, I expect. Hyper-cupidity, with hereditary complications and predatory predispositions.

The long and short of the interview was that the Jew would buy.

"Vell, vot you vont for dese? Monee, hein? Odder stone, hein? Nize tiamons!" seductive tremoloso with his fat be-diamonded paws. (I'm sorry about the patter, I won't offend again, I want you to get a clear idea of the rogue, to tell me if you think he was a rogue. I can't settle in my own mind even now whether he was or not.)

After the tenth big emerald had been tipped onto the plush counter-cloth, he picked the lot up and said, "Here! come into my private office."

"Stop that," and then just in time I remembered my character and added, "Mister, fair square and open hands off our jewels, plees."

"Excuse me"—the Jew said,—"your property, of course; bring the lot in yourself, I don't blame you, I was a bit excited, that's all."

"Don't mention it, lead the way, Mister, please."

So we all squatted down at a low table in the dark back room. Even in the half-light we could see that there were magnificent carpets on the floor, wonderful carved-teak tables, with ivory and pearl inlay, with boxes of jewels on most. The Jew had been sorting and fondling his lovely wares when we arrived.

Evidently a man in a very big way, some of the boxes showed stones nearly as fine as our own. We had picked out the right man for our deal. Before deciding to go on with the deal he told us frankly he could not promise us ready cash, he would need a few days to get the money if we insisted on specie. Then we all

had coffee and delicious fat sensually-scented cigarettes. And the deal began again. Every time we got to a deadlock, the jewels were solemnly put up by us and more coffee and cigarettes were ordered in by the Jew. Then we talked about everything else under the sun except stones until the coffee was nearly finished, then by some chance remark (apparently) the curious subject of jewels would be broached again.

So the pantomime continued till well after midnight—and finally—with expressions of good will on both sides, we shook hands Western-fashion, on the price. The merchant let us out by his own private side-door, in an alley at the side of the main entrance.

We left half a dozen small stones, and the Jew gave us a bill at a week, on their value. That bill was sold next day I need hardly say, and it was extremely fortunate for us that we sold it then, as you will see later. The discount was not excessive, the merchant was too well known for that. The money was a godsend to us. We had a week now to close the deal, for of course it would never do for us to give the impression that we were short of money. To a Jew, that means—Squeeze! We had hinted that we were in ample funds and preferred the note as an exchange of bona-fides. Our stones, his note. No cheques and receipts and inquisitive bank-clerks for us!

Our next appointment was for two days later and the time had to be put in somehow, inconspicuously. That means shady and usually vicious neighborhoods, in Port Said, but we both knew how to take care of ourselves. I think I can smell a sandbag or a lead-pipe on a man. Turn wide round all corners and see everything out of the side of your eyes, and above all never look a suspected person in the face. Watch his hands; that nonsense about watching eyes is—nonsense, and will be bloody nonsense if your hands don't move

faster than the hand pulling out a knife. We had to get out of the streets sometimes, it was wisest; so we saw sights that make you doubt the existence of God in Heaven.

Like the city indescribable! The horrors of East and West in a steaming broth of vice.

On the second evening, after a day of torture in the heat of our stuffy, smelly cabin, we set off for the merchant just after dark. No time was fixed for our appointment till the final interview. The merchant lived at his shop and had said, "Come any time in the evening." I repeated my trick at the door, bouncing out quickly a few seconds after we might be expected to have gone inside.

I am not certain that I saw a figure dodge back as I jumped out of the doorway. Some fluttering shop-curtain, perhaps, in the light wind of evening blowing in off the desert, but it was worth while making sure; a moment's care might save a serious blunder, into booby traps, with our money. I told Casmyth to go on into the shop and open up conversation, saying that I was just coming; getting some cigarettes. After waiting in the doorway for half a minute, I stepped out in the direction of the thing I had seen fluttering. There was nothing, only a ragged-breeched Egyptian looking into a side window, near the place I had noticed the movement. I put the fellow down as a camel driver, just in from the desert; his lips were cracked and his eyes inflamed, so he was not of the town, at any rate. I bought my cigarettes a little farther down the street, and made my way back to the merchant's shop. As I passed into the doorway I coughed, hawked and spat, and made all the reasonable (Eastern reason) noises I could, to attract attention to my entrance. Then I bounced out again in a few seconds. "Ragged Breeks" never even looked round. All serene then, no spy or

thieves' lookout. Casmyth raised an eyebrow at me as I entered, and I shook my head.

We were disappointed in the Jew's reception. He said bluntly that he could not raise the sum arranged, under two more days. There was nothing to do but wait. So we agreed to come again. The Jew's manner did not seem suspicious, but there, you never know; all Jews seem able to lie without a hint of embarrassment. I don't say that Jews are bigger liars than Gentiles. I do say they are better.

Casmyth thought that the camel driver with the "seat" out of his breeks was of no great significance, but as a precaution, we decided to go back to the launch by separate and devious routes, watching for trailing as we went. We arrived at the boat within half an hour of each other, neither having noticed anything suspicious. To make sure, doubly sure, since we had now been in the port a week, we decided to change our mooring. It was a great nuisance, we should not find such another place so sheltered from the sun, but it had to be done. A small fortune was at stake, the trouble would be forgotten in a few days, when we had the money safely and were well on the way to freedom.

The launch was moved about three the next morning to a place farther down the Canal, almost at the end of the coal wharves opposite the French Legation.

Not an exposed situation from the sides, but no overhead shelter, and the heat during the day on that steel launch was—"hadeous," as Casmyth put it. We kept to the launch all day, suffering damnably. Damnably is right. As right as "hadeous." As soon as the light failed we dashed out amongst the coal dumps, to breathe. That was like a cure for asthma, a relief as incredible. Doctors please note.

The next day nearly drove us mad with heat. How we regretted never putting the teak cabin back when the

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launch was remodeled after the smash-up with those water thugs outside Aden. But all physical suffering comes to an end; it is only mental and spiritual suffering that continues till death becomes a welcome release.

By the time twilight came we were half-dead with suffocation, thirst and boredom. We decided to go to the merchant nearly an hour before our appointment.

The confinement of that low canvas shelter could be endured no more. Damn the Jew! he was making a good thing out of us; we weren't asking favors anyhow. Be blowed to his appointments! So we set off at once, going over the coal in different directions to a meeting at the provincial-looking "Place" in the center of the town, with the dreary palms and dusty rustic seats inside the green iron railings. I was only a few moments behind my friend at the "Place" and together we set off for the Jew's shop. The street was quite deserted as we approached the shop, and no sign of trailing, though we played hide-and-seek twice as we approached.

In the twilight we nearly fell over an Arab and a ragged camel driver squatting in the side passage of the shop. They both jumped at us as we entered. Cas-myth laid the Arab flat with a blow on the chin and I swept the camel driver to the ground with a left hack on his shins and a right swipe on his ear.

Then we ran for our lives!

No need to explain.

Arriving an hour before our time had unmasked the Jew's batteries. The hound! he had been keeping us dangling for a week while the Port Said police had been completing our *dossier*!

Yet I don't know, we have no proof of that, only a *Christian* readiness to nail faith on a Jewish cross.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### WE BECOME PAUPERS

I don't remember much of our bolt through the clammy alleys to our boat. It was all a question of moments now. We dare not separate.

Staggering over the coal-dumps in the dark, we pulled up our jewel box, flung the bundle of emeralds in, and I pushed and pulled the launch into the stream, past great tankers and along the sides of rusty tramps, fouling cables and anchor-chains, tearing my hands and not caring, unfeeling of nails splitting, throat and mouth dry and cracking with fear. At last Casmyth got the engine started, and with a bound we jumped into full speed at a shout behind us amongst the coal. To hell with you! we're off to the sea! thank God we're off to the sea, a mile and a half away, no more!

Water, food, oil, fuel, how much had we? Nothing like enough for Valetta. Well, it must be Alexandria. Cairo was closed by this time.

No sign of further pursuit yet, and I don't think we were followed far; we had the legs of anything in Port Said except perhaps some amateur speed "fans," and they were all gambling in the Casinos. There were no signs of pursuit all the way to the mouth of the estuary, and we turned N.W. for Alexandria, with fairly easy minds. We got all the food and stores we needed there, and went straight out to sea again, on the long stretch that ended in the total loss of the launch and everything of value we possessed except the clothes we stood in.

The sea began to get up soon after we left Alexandria, with a stiff breeze behind it. On the second day out that breeze was a gale. In the night the launch was plunging like a maddened horse, drenching us with spray, filling the boat and wearing us out with incessant bailing and throttling down. We were weary unto death nursing the engines. I need hardly say we carried no lights; they would have been blown out or washed out in ten seconds with the seas that swept us the second night; the launch was not built for such work; no small craft of metal is fit for it. Just before daybreak a small fruit-tramp ran us down and under before we could turn a spoke. She jumped on top of us from behind a big sea while we were waiting for it to pass us, throttled down and ready to spring forward, once over the comber. They had no lights; they never have, those fellows. We both managed to scramble on to a loop of anchor-chain that was hanging over their bows. The banging of the chain caught our ears and in the nick of time we both jumped for the sound, and the half-seen chain together.

Well, we were paupers now, on top of everything else.

The Greeks on the tramp were kind enough, and dirty beyond all possible belief. But they fed us, warmed us, and later clothed us, landing us at Tripoli, practically penniless! We said nothing of the vast treasure they had sunk in the Mediterranean. They assumed we were mad Englishmen—sport-mad,—and cruising around in gales in a small launch was to them merely another phase of an accepted national dementia. We let them think so.

When we left the fruiter we had the rags of our clothes, eked out with some upper garments we bought from the crew, and the money in our belts, the balance of the price of that Jew's treachery. (I shouldn't say

that, I suppose, for we really had no proof of it, except inferential proof. Without that Jew's money our state would have been parlous. Perhaps we owe him some gratitude. Let us be charitable.) Total resources about two thousand rupees, say six hundred dollars. And half Europe to put behind us.

And quickly, if Europe was going to hide us at all. There were near squeaks once or twice on that old fruiter. The crew spent half their time turning their eyeballs up to heaven, and the other half skipping about the deck like slapped fleas. They were good sailors, just the same, hearty, heave-altogether and pull-out-the-bollard idiots. The stokers were quite otherwise. They had to be battened down in a state of mutiny on one occasion, and Casmyth went with them, and "a good time was had by everyone," as the man says nightly on my radio.

When Tripoli was sighted at last my friend and I were undisguised scarecrows, indistinguishable from the rest of the scary crew; complete, with dirt, grime, and chin-stubble.

It is no use crying over spilt milk, so when the skipper of that Greek, antique (slightly maritime) fruit scow embraced us both at parting, we did not push him off too roughly. Our loss was an accident of the sea—some sea-god smote us, angry at the long immunity we had enjoyed from complete ruin trafficking in his domain,—or was it Vishnu sporting, flicking us with his fish tail?

In the purlieus of Tripoli I sorted the few papers in my pocketbook that had escaped the effects of water and wear; amongst them I found that scrawl of Razzan's on my old passbook, the map of the Desert route that led to the famous treasure. I handed it over to Casmyth and went on tearing up old bills and letters. My friend had been sunk in a reverie when last

I looked at him, haggard and worn with the toil of the fruiter's stokehold, bearded untidily, dirty and ragged; my heart was wrung with the sight of him bowed in the old weary fight with bitter memory. I thought the map might distract him a moment. I knew his pain.

When next I glanced up there was my old gallant comrade, sitting in the same chair, flashing eye and firm mouth! I was shocked, almost.

"Bedad, we'll go and get that treasure and save Viroschand too!" Those were his words as he leaned over to slap my back. Need I say more? What *is* the Irish secret?

We waited till night fell and then joined the first caravan going into the interior toward Aleppo—on donkeys.

Our plans were soon settled; poor men don't take long over such matters. Usually they have only one thing to do, bow before circumstance. We proposed to bow, but it was out of the presence of that haughty autocrat. Back into the outer courts, where the courtiers were dicing for fun. Come on! Pawn the shirt on your back and have a last fling! That is what we proposed. More accurately, that was my view of the matter; I think my friend had a far more rosy, misty, idea of those ragged garments. He nearly got a shroud for his shirt.

Briefly, our plan was to go with a caravan across the north of the Syrian Desert till we struck the Euphrates, swapping company as opportunity offered till our objective was reached; then down the Euphrates to Basra at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, more properly speaking; then down south to Karachi by the first of the pearl fleet, or any other kind of country wallah if it was too early for pearlers.

From Karachi to Kachi we left indeterminate, till we could get to Karachi.

Say two thousand miles, free.

It is quite free, walking, paddling, swimming and so forth. There are no heavy overhead expenses, transport, recurrent or initial outlay. You would never regret it if you tried that journey. I would do it tomorrow if my firm would keep my job open for nine months or a year.

Through the country where history was manufactured faster than autos in Detroit. I wish to be disingenuous, for once. Frankly, the "trip" would not be a luxurious wafting, on a magic carpet of modern skill and comfort, through the mystic lands of Eastern Romance, the lands where Jamshad reveled and drank deep. Far from it. You would not have one moment of comfort through all the two thousand miles from the time you left the *Messagerie Maritime* steamer at Beirut or Tripoli till you reached Karachi.

There, if you knew your way about (and you would by the end of that trip), you would go to the Scind Club, mention my name, and sensuous tears might then roll down your cheeks at the graceful appointments that surround you. The finest club in the East, in a land where a Club Secretary is only slightly less important than a High Commissioner.

The memory of those tears would make you a contented man for the rest of your life. Perhaps you prefer discontent? It is a high price to pay for merely a state of mind, I admit.

But it is the most fascinating journey in the world, not excepting the Itinerary of Antoninus. Some people think Alexander the Great brought his Greeks down that way to conquer India, and some say he came by way of the Khaibar Pass. Personally, I think he was a fool if he did the latter, with the whole of his transport

on wheels or sledges, when he could float the lot downstream by water, in barges. What do you think? If you do my trip you may be able to settle that matter once for all, by the time you get to Bagdad; what am I saying? by the time you get opposite Ctesiphon. A tremendous lot hangs on that vexed question. Think it over, the Atlantic has been crossed both ways now. But there are still conquests, for drooping Alexanders.

"Happy is he who has made a successful journey," said Ulysses.

"Happy for life if you make a success of that," say I.

My friend was wrong when he said we might save Viroschand if we got the treasure. Nevertheless, as a pair of paupers, we could do nothing for anyone. We could not go back to Viroschand empty-handed, we thought. We were destined to go back in just that way, empty; that we might learn at last a lesson which no treasure can buy.

The West cannot exploit the East, ruthlessly, with impunity.

The Pagoda Tree is plucked.

Withered branches strew the ground around that Tree, torn down by the hands of Westerners who have broken into that Eastern estate for a hundred years. The Tree droops like a ravished maiden from the onslaughts of a savage horde. It may never recover. Perhaps the Tree needed pruning, but there was no need to lop it till it was withered and bent. Its essential quality permits no grafting. It dies, in the third season thereof.

Casmyth jumped into the collar, at the start of our new adventure. The fine fire, that all Irishmen can produce at a moment's notice for a gallant enterprise, leapt up within him. This was a project after his own

heart. No shady trafficking here. No bootlegging under a fancy name. Tremendous risks, fabulous profits, and all in the way of honorable adventure.

Our resources would be barely sufficient to sustain us in the attempt, even with the utmost economy, but all obstacles recede before the onslaught of men who are whole-hearted and determined. Where we could not pay money we would give our services in exchange for assistance. In fine, we would keep our eyes on the guiding star of fortune, and stumble if we must; but we would reach our goal somehow.

When I saw the change that came over my companion I was almost glad that we had suffered the complete loss of our fortune. That fortune was to him a barbed hook tearing at his senses. This employment would loosen its hold. Casmyth made even the cheerless night-marches across Syria seem pleasant. A merry heart goeth all the day, and all the night, too.

I rejoiced as we stumbled along with that rabble out of Syria. As a matter of fact, we never had to undertake the long weary riverine journey through Mesopotamia. On the third day out from Tripoli we descended a ridge of boulder-strewn hills, and there was Redwin, the aviator, in the plain of dried mud, fussing round a great monoplane. The whole caravan turned to and cleared the ground for his runway when he was ready to take the air. He was returning to Karachi, and took us aboard and landed us at dawn, just outside Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf.

I think it is much better to let that statement stand as a simple matter of actual fact, rather than support it with a long chain of obvious events, only adding that Redwin was then on the trial trip for his great flight over the Himalayas to Moscow via Samarkhand. If the coincidence had not happened to me I should not believe it possible, even in the destiny of men marked like our-

selves to run to the uttermost limits of their strength before fate should strike them down.

It gives me cold shivers down my back even now to think of that flight. I am certain we were upside down occasionally during the night.

At Basra began the last adventure of my "Avatar in Vishnu Land," a Desert Incarnation. More accurately, an adventure in the Desert Incarnate.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### “KASHMIR-I-KUTCH” REVISITED

If you glance at a map of Mesopotamia you will see that we were at the ancient seaport that once collected all the merchandise of Mesopotamia coming down the Euphrates and the Tigris and despatched it throughout the littoral of the earliest civilizations of Earth.

The nations along the Mediterranean littoral, the Etruscan, Macedonian Greek, Egyptian even, are parvenus compared with the nations that lined the shores of the sea that culminated in Basra.

Now Basra is a seaport no longer. Many miles of dreary sand separate it from the muddy sea that must soon become like the sandy wastes that line its banks.

We tramped all those miles from Basra to the sea-coast in the night, sheltering from the fierce noonday sun as best we might, in shallow ravines and dry-water courses.

Basra we dared not enter.

It was necessary therefore to reach the distant sea-coast and get a native craft to help us on our way to Kutch Mandvi, the end of the first stage of our projected treasure-hunt. Late the second night we sighted the lights of the ships, away across the desert to the south, and by early morning we saw the blinding silver streak that marks all water in those regions.

We reached the seaport exhausted beyond measure. And for two days I was unable to put foot to ground, but I do not remember being dispirited despite my physical sufferings, our desperate financial straits and

our beggarly quarters. Casmyth was in high spirits although he had more than a touch of sun-stroke, to steady him up.

It may be asked, why didn't we take steamer or camels? Steamers would be British and semi-official in attitude to all travelers—hand-in-glove with the Government—aboard one we ran considerable risk of apprehension on sight—and camels would be excessively dear to buy and sell in such a short necessity. We needed every penny we could save, for the camels we required for the dash across the Great Indian Thar. Those camels would have to be Bikaner racing-camels and our slender resources would be strained to the uttermost to purchase them.

There would also be a considerable amount of expense in closing Mrs. Casmyth's enormous establishment up the Rann. We had no illusions about the price we should get for the furniture and fittings—the place was as bare as a barn, for the most part. The house itself would be difficult to sell, and personally I felt it would be indelicate even to suggest such a thing to my friend. Better to let it quietly slip into the limbo of sad things forgotten and self-effacing. In a short time all would crumble to the dried mud from which it was built. Its fairy domes and minarets would begin to collapse almost as soon as the staff of white-washers and blue-washers and purple-washers was dismissed from their never-ceasing task. The first big rain might be two years in coming, but it would simply wash the whole house away if the thin coat of lime over the whole exterior was not in good order when it did arrive.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust," as Casmyth used to sing. Strange creatures we humans are. We actually hummed that tune, sang some of it, while we were dismantling that palace that had been the Kashmir of his Avatar in Vishnu Land!

But not the last line. That was too poignantly reminiscent of lost love.

My friend was all keyed-up about the desert treasure, but memory shook him like a fever occasionally and tears were often in my own eyes as we came across little things she had taken pleasure in—or raged about—like the great black-and-white piano with the keys all stuck. I don't mean that we tried the keys then, all the treasure in the world would not have induced us to do that. But you remember that was how we found the piano at our first visit.

When the whole house was gutted and everything sold that was salable, there was not enough to pay the arrears of the servants' wages. They had to take part of their wages out in odds and ends of furniture. They did not lose thereby, for I know Indian dealers. They simply can't bring themselves to pay Sahibs a fair price for things they know they will make huge profits on. It is a psychological fact. They can't do it, even if they wish to. The assumption is that Sahibs are a species who must be cheated excessively, defrauded, tricked and generally flouted in any bargaining—but it is quite another matter with their own kind. Fair prices will be asked and paid, and although the arguments will be long and hotly contested—there will be no outrageous discrepancy between the price accepted and the value of the articles involved.

We could not bother with agents and finesse at such a time, so when the servants were paid off we stacked the remaining lot up in the garden and said, "How much?" to the junk-merchants.

So much.

"Double it."

"Impossible, Sahib!"

"Hand it all over to the servants, as a gift—Govind! Ranechu! Come and help yourselves!"

"Sahib! Sahib! One moment!"

"Well, what is it?"

"A little more might be paid."

"Ho!—Govind! Ranechu!—take it away, *jeldi tano!*"

"Sahib! Double the price then."

"Hand it over!"

So we shut up the house—locked the great teak gates set in the deep archway and threw the key into the nearest ditch. We meant to lock ourselves out of "Kashmir-i-Kutch" forever. Vishnu must have chuckled and blown some merry notes on his pipes as he saw that key thrown away. Then we tramped to the Bazaars, for camels and drivers. It was about this time that a bad bout of fever got hold of me, and quinine would not touch it. If I had had my way we would have given up the whole idea of the treasure then and there.

## CHAPTER XXX

### PLANS FOR SELLING THE PALACE

What an extraordinary thing! I have just realized that I have brought my history all this way ahead of its proper sequence by completely omitting the boat-journey down the Persian and Baluchi littoral.

Well, it can't be helped now. That was a saga, amongst those pearl-fishers! It would take a volume to describe it.

We left Tripoli looking like ragged Greek sailors and arrived in Karachi half-Greek and half-Arab but much more ragged still. A couple of Gulf scare-crows!

But our condition had one good aspect. With a few slight changes in costume we would be able to get about Karachi without a soul knowing we were Sahibs. Our speech would no longer betray us and our disguise was impenetrable. We even had the requisite vermin!

Everyone should visit Karachi once. It is the end of all petty, peevish, modern things and the beginning of all the soothing, careless largeness and spaciousness of things that have been from time immemorial, and will be when the weary world is fast asleep after ten thousand years of machine-made uniformity.

In Karachi you walk out of a corrugated iron "movie" theater and duck under the snaking heads of a camel caravan tied tail to nose, moving softly toward the illimitable desert at the end of the street. The wind blows the desert sands in to carpet each side of the street. The Western householders busily sweep the encroach-

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ment of the desert out of their compounds, off their wide verandahs, even out of their innermost rooms, a never-ending repulsion of the desert that softly shall cover all things in its own time.

The strangest thing of all is to note the difference in the reaction of the native Baluchis and the Westerners. The vast desert-spaces at their doors drive the natives there, to huddle together like conies, dwelling on under-dwelling, shouldering each other in a gregarious jostle. They know and fear space and its bitter loneliness.

The Westerner knows nothing, cares nothing, defies everything. House can scarcely see neighbor, in many of the residential sections. Vast spaces surround any building of importance, roads are pointed perspectives of loneliness. Everything of interest is an oasis in a desert. The longest taxi drive in the world is from the Karachi docks to the nearest hotel, or it seems so when you have to pay for it on first landing.

Every place you wish to reach is etched delicately like silver-point, on the edge of the far horizon; the few streets that make up the town cling to each other for company till the last, ending abruptly at the beginning of space; the rare street-cars seem to hesitate long at the edge of the town before they commence their timorous adventure into the shimmering unknown, and soon they lose heart, turn tail and scurry back to the huddled streets, out of the blinding white glare into the shelter of the black-barred shadows amongst the shops.

We did not care to take street-cars, and taxis were beyond our means. So we tramped from oasis to oasis through the thick, soft white dust till the soles of our feet were covered with horn.

We were searching for a native ship-owner who would let us work our passage to the Rann of Kutch.

At last we found a contractor who was in need of cement and we agreed to work on his ship to Dwazka if he would put us off at Mandvi on the return journey. We got our food, and nothing else for our work.

It nearly broke his heart to hire men at Dwazka to take our place, but he let us go near the mouth of the estuary that runs up into the Great Rann of Kutch. We jumped as the great sail of a shore dhow sheered alongside, slid down the boom and the mast and splashed into the half-water-logged boat, and in an hour were ashore, soaked to the skin, but happy to be at last at the real commencement of the greatest of all our adventures.

We joined a caravan going overland and after several days and nights of dreary plodding, arrived near the Palace, as I have already told you.

The Bikaner animals we wanted were beyond our means. We had to be satisfied with the slow-plodding camels of the trade caravans. All our dreams of a dashing adventure with a swift return, loaded with honestly gained wealth, fell to the ground. It would be a long dreary plodding affair, with food and water melting away for practically no perceptible progress toward our goal. It was all too risky, I thought. I was shaking with fever, and depressed, and I could not help feeling dispirited.

"It can't be done," I said to Casmyth.

"It must be done," he replied, "surely you are not going to balk at a little risk like this after all we have been through together? Think, in three months' time Viroschand will be facing that horde of villains in Calcutta—can we return to him like a couple of beggars when he will need powerful and wealthy friends as a drowning man needs a life-belt?"

"You ask me to think, but it is you who should think. We have only sketch-maps, little accurate information about the water-holes or wells—no guides, and

no previous experience of the conditions we must face for weeks on end perhaps."

"What do we want with guides? They can only take us to the end of the usual caravan routes—when our real work must begin—and as for conditions, all deserts are alike, only hardness of body and mind can prevail against them—and we have both. Buck up, old man, you'll soon shake that fever off."

So, against my better judgment we set to work to draw up maps in the form of an itinerary with all the information we could remember of Rahzan's descriptions of the treasure and its location. The rough map Rahzan drew on his death-bed we could only regard as collateral evidence, corroborating the general trend of his hints—vague, certainly inaccurate. The map is simply a wobbly line amongst names of villages ending in a definite northeasterly direction, after crossing the Luni Umarkot Railway.

We pared everything down to the last penny,—but it would not do. We had not sufficient resources for the necessary stores and camels.

We were at our wits' end.

There was only one solution to our difficulties and that I would not mention to Casmyth.

To my surprise, he mentioned it himself just when we were on the point of deciding to risk all on a few Bikaner camels and an expedition that could only end in certain death (unless a miracle intervened). After a long silence I heard him say:

"Why not try to sell the Palace, we can't be certain that no one will look at the place till we ask them, anyhow?"

So we decided to sell "Kashmir-i-Kutch" forthwith.

Then began the extraordinary conflict, which, for lack of a better description, I shall call hereafter the "Kashmir-i-Kutch Campaign."

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We had moved on to Mandura in our efforts to find suitable camels for the dash into the Great Thar. Mandura is a seaport on the Gulf of Kutch, about sixty-five miles east of Mandvi, and we were no nearer or farther from our objective than at Mandvi. We could work our way eastward along the peninsula that divides the two great inland seas, the Greater and the Lesser Rann, and kick off from Tharad into the blue. Or we could work coastwise, northwest through Abdesa into Scind and kick off near the great Salt Lakes of Umarnkot. We could do either of these things—if we had the necessary camel caravan and stores.

But we had not.

And only the sale of the Palace, nestling in the low hills, would put us in possession of the necessary resources to get them.

Without debating the matter further, we set off to take possession of Casmyth's property, with the intention of putting it up for sale amongst the local gentry, or failing that, to find a purchaser on a basis of building-material.

Simple, and only sentiment had held me back from the process for the last week or so.

Simple to say—but not so simple to achieve, when you find a large colony of criminals in possession of your property, and no effective authority nearer than five hundred miles to help you to assert your rights, and nothing to prove your rights, in any case.

It was true, we hadn't the slightest scrap of evidence to show we were the owners of the Palace.

We realized this fully the evening when we climbed our own walls, near the great white archway with the carved teak gates (they were still locked), and found the whole house twinkling with lights, and the grounds dotted with camp-fires. We had no warning as we approached, of such a state of affairs, for like all Indian

domestic property, the walls are high and complete the cordon of the demesne, most jealously preserving the whole interior arrangements from enemy-spying or vulgar curiosity.

There were plenty of dogs near the fires, so we had to be careful; those vile yellow curs are as fierce as wolves, in force or backed up by their masters.

"Here's a nice lot of visitors in your baronial halls," I said to Casmyth, and I could have bitten my tongue out for saying it. "Back," he said, "out of this, quick."

"Why? Aren't we going to inquire when they propose to clear out?"

"They won't clear out—till we make them. They are criminal tribes!"

One careful look was enough to confirm this opinion, and then I remembered the character of those migratory pests who infest every part of India—fierce and brutally debased gypsies—who levy a tax on all who have no power to resist them, as the price of their departure, and to whom robbery and murder are matters of professional pride.

A band may be dozens or hundreds. They are called "criminal tribes" in all cases, small band or large band, on sight, and one sight is enough to distinguish them forever from the rest of mankind.

These wretched people have a caste, strange though it sounds, and a hereditary Prince of their caste, who must perform some debasing form of knavery, annually, before competent witnesses, in order to retain his dignity and sovereignty.

Nature places the darkest dark against the whitest white, invariably; the most orderly people in the world—Indians, whose religion is chiefly an exposition of the order inherent in all created things—these have the most disorderly people in their midst.

I say "most disorderly" intentionally; the criminal tribes are disorderly from conviction—not by hazard or necessity—it is a racial creed, with innumerable adherents taking pride in that creed. Kutch is the chief home of that race.

Such were the invaders of the property we had so lightly proposed to sell. Such were the people we must turn out, without the slightest authority for our actions, and without hope of assistance from any surrounding powers. Rather might we expect resistance from the latter if we succeeded, for then the criminal horde would camp down, on some adjacent Indian's property—with robbery and blackmail and worse as the immediate result of their removal from *our* property.

It would be a single-handed battle, and a battle of wits entirely, for now we commanded no forces.

"What can we do against a crowd like that?" I said to my friend.

"I don't know, yet, but I will have them out somehow if it takes a year to do it. The swine!—in her house!"

"Could we enlist some of the fisher-folk or the coastal traders to help us fight them?"

"Not a hope; they don't like criminal tribes, but they are people with rights, ancient and accepted traditions, so they are always bought off—that is the custom—we must bow to it."

"You mean we must buy them off—pay them to leave our property?"

"The very thing!" said Casmyth. "We'll buy them off and then rob them! Rob the robbers! Spoil the Egyptians! Splendid!" and that awful back-slapping started again.

"Steady, they might hear you," I said. We were in the road just opposite the entrance archway.

"Let 'em—the sooner the better"—and before I

could stop the impetuous Irishman he was hammering on the gate and shouting:—

*"Ho! Ker hi! Tera muncta; geldí jao!"*

We were in for it now. I jumped up onto the top of the wall near the gate, and peeping round the archway, saw the nearest criminals standing up near the fires and looking toward us. The swarms of dogs began barking and running toward the gate and soon several men followed them. I armed myself with a large stone and took a position alongside my friend.

"There must be a couple of hundred of them."

"All the better."

"Why?"

"More minds, less sense."

"Something in that I daresay. Here's a few of them anyway." As I spoke we heard a scrambling on the far side of the gate and several shock heads appeared at the top, holding on to the spikes.

"Open that gate, and leave this property—do you know I am the owner of all? If one man or dog of you is within my compound in ten minutes' time, may yellow dogs defile my grave if I do not slay them with my own hands."

"Who art thou?" said one of the shock heads.

"I will show thee who I am,"—and he let fly a stone that missed the speaker by half an inch—"dost bandy words with me, the owner of all!"

They were impressed by the ferocity of Casmyth's attack.

"We cannot open the gate—we climbed over the wall on arrival, and finding the house empty and tenantless, stayed within as is our right."

"Right! you talk to me of rights!—Thieves! Murderers! Blackmailers! I will slay you all with my lathi—those that escape my sword that is—Out I say!—ere many heads fall from shoulders!"

"Nay, but we are many, and you are only two and we have weapons as well, and moreover we are on the inside of the wall and this strong gate. If indeed thou art the owner as thou sayest—'twere better to talk of a price for our departure, as is our right."

"Right! Right!" (dance of exasperation in the road, dimly lighted now by the rising moon)—"Dog, swine, wilt drive me mad with talk of rights,—out I say!—ere I bring the people of my house upon you and slay you to a man!"

"Verily thou talkest like an ignorant fool; son of noseless ones for fifty generations; dost know so little of these parts that thou can'st not recognize the cousin of the Prince of Kutch!—"

This was my improvisation, and as Casmyth was still dancing as one possessed, I had to keep it going.

The invaders were not impressed. They only laughed and said:

"Our cousin is Lord Gate and our powerful family in direct unbroken line of descent is from —— and —— Rancee Wall." (This is partly obscene and need not be made more explicit.) "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

"Good enough," whispered Casmyth, "keep them laughing," and he stopped dancing just long enough to let off a few potent insults to the rows of heads on the gates and on each side of it.

"Dogs, Swine! Corpse-consumers! Out I say!"

"Truly you have illustrious members in your family, but when we return and batter in the gate, perhaps you will see you made a mistake in the sex of your relatives."

This sally was received with uproarious laughter and many more like it passed from the stage set in the road to the spectators in the gallery, on the gate.

Then Casmyth ceased his frantic capers of rage and madness and coming forward slowly said:

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"I am something of a liar myself even as you robbers on my gate,—indeed I am a poor man—with only the property you have taken possession of."

"That's better," said our guests, "and now the price—what wilt thou pay if we leave—next week?"

More dancing, argument, until finally in the hour around midnight we agreed to hand over three hundred rupees if they would leave on the morrow at moon-rise. This was a vast sum, requiring much time to raise, said Casmyth, he could just manage it by tomorrow night.

So we left the scoundrels followed by a stream of good-natured obscenity about our relations.

"Why didn't you make it tonight?" I said to Casmyth.

"We have a little plot to perfect. We need some time. Don't think I am going to let them get away with the price—or give them half a chance to return and repeat their blackmail."

"What's the idea?"

"This,—I thought of it suddenly while I was acting mad,—when the last man, woman and dog is over that wall and in the road," and then he told me of a scheme that laid me flat on my back, rolling in the dust and holding my sides lest the exquisite pain of my mirth should rend my body and let out my soul on wings of laughter.

He proposed the enlistment of the most irresistible forces in the lives of the people we were dealing with.

Success, final and complete, was absolutely assured. So we returned to our poor lodging, happier than we had been for many a day. Such is the exhilarating effect of inspiration in adversity, inspired methods of defending one's proper rights that is. In such cases even adversity seems palatable, and ordered by Vishnu for a just resolution. Does this give you some clue to our little *ruse de guerre*? If not, reader, be patient a little

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longer—all will be made plain—plain as the gates of “Kashmir-i-Kutch” in the rising moon.

So ended the first stage of the “Kashmir-i-Kutch Campaign,” honors even.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### AN ENCOUNTER WITH GIPSIES

From dawn to dusk of the next day, Casmyth was a very busy man. I did my part, but it was chiefly that of an experimental chemist, interspersed with fetching and carrying for my friend as he labored at an invention. The sweat made little pools as it dropped from his nose and chin onto the stone flags of the go-down (lock-up shed) we had selected for our workshop.

Our "engine of war" was only just finished as the last of the light died out of the sky, and in twenty minutes it was quite dark, as is the way of evening in those latitudes.

Then we rested a while from our labors to eat a scanty meal. We put the three hundred rupees into a bag, divided our "engine" into the smallest convenient component parts and set off down the road to "Kashmir-i-Kutch." The road was completely deserted as we approached the Palace, indeed it was a private road leading nowhere else, and it faded into the desert a few hundred yards beyond the compound-walls.

Despite the deserted appearance of all the surroundings of the Palace, we left the road about a quarter of a mile from the archway and took to the sandy ravines on the seaward side, making a detour that would enable us to creep up to the archway through the long bents in the ravines without possible risk of being seen from the compound.

When we were exactly opposite the archway, we looked around carefully and seeing nothing suspicious,

swiftly crept into its dark recesses, with our first load of "component parts."

Two more crossings of the dark road into the sandy ravines, and all our "props" were under the archway.

Then we set quietly and swiftly to work.

The moon would not rise for an hour, and then it would be only in its first quarter, so we could count on nearly two hours of dark for our purpose. At last all was ready, down to the last wooden lever, and pulley, and rope. Then we quietly climbed the compound-wall to hide our costumes for the grand finale. We placed them in readiness in one of the recesses of the archway on the compound side, with sundry tins, containing a mysteriously luminous fluid, hidden beside them.

Then we went to work to file off the lock that held the great teak doors fast, replacing the lock with a stout peg of wood with a string tied to it, pushing the string through the crack between the doors, At last all was in readiness for the first part of the engagement. We were taking the war into the enemy's country,—the country where all his fears and hopes dwelt, and had dwelt, in the company of Siva, for thousands of years and will, for thousands to come. To this day they all believe that Kali, the wife of Siva, nightly roams the forests and lonely places, riding on a tiger, clothed in snakes, wreathed with skulls, devouring all whom she desires as prey.

When we were satisfied that all was in readiness we retired up the road toward the town for a few hundred yards, and returned singing together in a fairly loud voice some old Indian songs befitting lonely travelers at such an hour of night.

Casmyth helped me to look over the wall a little distance from the archway. All was well; we were heard, and the whole tribe was laughing and running through the compound toward the archway.

Then we rapped loudly with our lathis on the teak gates.

Laughter, scrambling and a sea of heads over the gate and on the walls nearby.

The moon was well risen, and a pale ghostly light suffused everything.

"Ho! master beggar, etc., etc.," said Casmyth, holding up the bag and jingling the coin. "There is the price as agreed—now get thee gone and all thy people with thee. See, the moon rises to light thee on thy way hence."

"Nay, but I must first count the money to see that all is correct. Come thou over the wall and we will bring lights and make the account straight between us."

"Not so, here is enough light to count money between honest folk." (This was flattery, and skilful—after our stream of insults.) It was well received.

Much hoarse whispering amongst the tousled heads.

"True, it is as thou sayest. I will come down into the road, and if the price is in thy bag as agreed, then will I and all my people depart."

"Not so, thou shalt not see so much as one piece of this good silver money" (loud clinking of money in bag) "till all thy company are on this side of the wall."

"But that was not in our agreement."

"It was in mine, and I am the holder of the bag; gather thy people or I go hence never to return." (Loud clinking.)

They could not resist that sound and soon the chief man said:

"Be it as thou desirest, we will gather about thee in the road."

"With all thy women and tents and gear?"

"Even as thou desirest."

"Then be swift, for I meant to buy another fair young wife with this vast sum and she awaits in the

town. I shall get my house in time in any event. In truth I think it would be better to wait, in any case—great houses without wives are a weariness.”

“We come, do not depart,—see here come our goods and women!”

“Swiftly then, lest I change my mind.”

Soon the whole filthy company was lined up in the road; I don’t know whether they meant some devilment, even as we did, but they never got a chance to start it. I slipped quietly round the edge of the crowd watching for treachery, and seeing no sign of it, backed stealthily into the black shadow of the deep archway.

As soon as the last coin was counted into the bag from the cloth in the road, where they had poured it, Casmyth shouted:—

“*Thik hi!*”

I pulled down the covering cloth from the gates, and lo! Horror of horrors!

There stood Kali the terrible, flaming and wreathed in writhing snakes, sitting on a blood-dripping tiger.

“*Ai! Ai! Kali! Kali! Kali!*”

And the whole of that fetid mob fell on their faces in the dust, screaming, pouring dust on their heads, beating their heads on the ground.

“Quick,” said Casmyth, “hand me the strings and start howling inside the arch.”

The ghastly thing jerked about like the horrors of delirium.

Pulling the string of the wooden peg and keeping the horrors jumping with the other hand, Casmyth let me through the doors and slipped after me. Still pulling like mad at Kali and the tiger, we dressed feverishly and dashed luminous paint all over ourselves—then the great doors swung quickly back into their recesses.

Oh! What a sight stood in the archway!

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*"Oh! Kali! Kali! Kali!"*

*"Mercy! Mercy! Mercy!"*

But no mercy was forthcoming, on that awful night.

Kali bounded amongst them, the howling, frenzied mob; biting, tearing (with tin claws) and roaring (with a megaphone) and in thirty seconds there was not a "criminal tribe" to be seen, nor do I think any will ever be seen before that so-awful archway till the end of Indian time.

"God! You weigh about a ton, I should think. My hands and knees are a mass of bruises," said Casmyth as he pulled the bamboo framework of the tiger's head over his ears.

"I'm sorry, but you wouldn't be Kali, it's your own fault."

"Well, you weren't big enough for the part,—wasn't it great! I snatched the bag just in time. The beggar held on until he was sure it was Kali, but the jumping tiger settled him."

Then we went to the archway, tore down our handiwork, closed the gates and returned to the lonely Palace.

So ended the Campaign of "Kashmir-i-Kutch."

I wonder what Vishnu thought that night?

The Palace was not so filthy as we had expected, knowing the character of its late occupants. But we preferred to sleep in one of the verandahs with a fire in a corner, collecting some of the fire-wood from the piles recently stacked in the compound, and stamping out all the fires in their vicinity.

"We were lucky to find that phosphorus," I said as I smoked a cheroot before going to sleep.

"Oh! We could have managed with local fireworks if you hadn't found the dope."

"What a terrible power Kali must be in the lives of such people."

"Yes, they sacrifice children to her, I'm told, all over India still, quietly—the casteless people, that is."

"I can well believe it. You remember that last factory Viroschand built? It was partly on the site of an old sacred tank filled twenty or thirty years ago. The people would not work on that end of the building at all until a girder fell down there and killed a baby. Then the factory went up like smoke. Nothing else but human sacrifice—to appease the local gods—in essence, you know."

"I remember, Viroschand was heartbroken about it. The parents wouldn't take any compensation. And that made Viroschand feel worse. He told me it made him ashamed to be an Indian."

"He's right; there must be many of Viroschand's sort in India, that we have never met, but there's about three hundred and twenty million of the others."

"What a country! Riddled with superstition from end to end."

"You're right—good night, old man."

"Good night."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### IN QUEST OF BURIED TREASURE

Next morning we set about the arrangements for the sale of "Kashmir-i-Kutch."

As we tramped about the town seeing various people we thought might help us, I could not help voicing my fears about our projected treasure-hunt.

"It's only legend and rumor of a treasure—at the best," I said.

"Yes, but it's Indian legend, and Baluchi and Persian, and Mohammedan and any other nation's you can think of that has heard of the Indian. Where there is such a persistent and wide-spread legend, there is usually something solid behind it. I'm for trying it anyhow. We can never pay for the *Shah Jehan* unless we do find that treasure."

"I've been thinking about that a lot since we left Zukker. What makes you certain that paying for the *Shah Jehan* will clear us with Viroschand? I have sometimes thought Viroschand doesn't care whether we pay or not. Just an idea, you know, a kind of conviction. Besides, his present difficulties are not going to be solved by a trifle like the price of the schooner."

"Don't be absurd—of course we must pay for the schooner, and just as soon as we can."

"Even if it has ceased to be Viroschand's property?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

Then I told my friend of the mortgage.

"I don't see how that makes much difference, we must pay the mortgagees," said Casmyth.

"But the mortgagees didn't lend us the schooner, and we had no agreement with Viroschand in case of shipwreck."

"Oh, blow your business quibbles. We lost the schooner, and we have to pay Viroschand or whoever loses by us."

"Yes, I suppose that is ethically correct."

"I'm going to do it anyway, and that's why I mean to get that treasure."

"Well, if you are set on it, let's go."

The whole prospect of the enterprise seemed to have such beneficial effects on my companion I was loath to say any more. Even if we never found the treasure, at least I had roused my friend, restored him to a great measure of health, mentally and physically.

That was a treasure in itself.

Henceforth I would go forward firmly. We sold the grounds of "Kashmir-i-Kutch" to a camel-dealer, as a camel compound, and we induced a timber-merchant to pull the place down for the sake of the beams, planks, windows and doors.

The demolition was an essential part of the agreement and we stayed until it was finished.

Then we turned our back on that place and I have never seen or heard of it since.

We got nearly 8,000 rupees (about \$2500) from the two dealers, and had enough for our camel caravan, and the necessary stores.

Our plan was to push as far as we dared, with the whole caravan; make a cache of food and water, and send a section back; push on, make another cache and send another section back and at the third cache make our dash on four camels for the site of the treasure.

Each cache had to contain sufficient stores of water and food to enable us and the head sections to make the next inner cache on the return journey—sufficient,



Map of the route to the treasure of the Great Thar; drawn on the back of the author's pass-book by Razhan just before he died.



that is, for camels traveling very lightly and quickly. As regards stores, it is entirely a question of proportion; you can work it out for yourself. But you can't work out the proportion for unforeseen factors that arise,—unforeseeable! incalculable! They are the gravest dangers, as everyone knows who has tried to use the desert for his own ends.

What shall I say now? What is wisest? For treasure-hunting will turn hard brains into soft quicker than women or wine. The treasure was there when we arrived at the site legend claimed for its location.

It is still there.

You can go and get it any day you care to try. No one will stop you. But lest anyone should entertain the idea of trying to succeed, by means of more adequate commissariat, more forethought, more elaborate transport, let me say at once you will bring no more away than we did. The description of just how much we brought away will occupy the closing chapters of this history.

Now look at the rough sketch-map our old lieutenant, Rahzan, drew with his last flickering vital forces. You will see that the word "diamonds" is written under the cross in Persian characters, smeared and tremulous, but quite indisputable (just above the words "Calcutta, Simla and Delhi"), and diamonds was the form of treasure our old warrior used invariably to refer to. He stuck to his diamonds despite all my arguments about geological improbability, and so on, and in the end I was forced to the conclusion that the diamonds must have been imported in the dim ages past and deposited, or hidden in the heart of the Great Thar. You must remember that there were always small discrepancies in our conversation on the subject, "lacunae" in our several brands of Hindustani always eked out with

Rahzan's poor English, but the general gist of our conversations was uniform and consistent—the treasure was there and a bold man could get it!

Diamonds could be got by a bold dash north and northeast from the railway line. That was the message of the old warrior's map, and the only clear message. In other respects the map is only of value in correlation to the data I had compiled from time to time from his conversation, particularly his last. The vital point being the number of "khos" northeast from Islamkot or due north from Tharad that the line of water holes commence. The water holes are shown by crosses under the word "diamond" in Persian characters. The whole secret is contained in that information. Find the first water hole and know the formation of the others, with their approximate distances apart, and the rest—is certain?—No!—still full of chance.

The distance from the head of the Great Rann is approximately 400 miles, if the number of days' journey is any guide. It might easily be 150 miles more or 150 less. For the sake of precaution we put it down as 450 miles, in a line due north of the head-waters of Kutch, up to the first hole, and slightly easterly afterwards. Roughly speaking, a northerly course throughout; say three weeks on good camels. Or adopting either of our alternative routes round the inland sea from Mandura, and following the railway line to a jumping-off point nearly midway between Islamkot and Tharad, say 350 miles into the blue.

Put in the simplest terms, we were to raise a northern perpendicular 350 miles on the railway line, using it as a base.

That railway line is probably the most mysterious thing in the world. It is almost like the conventional idea of the equator, an imaginary line running round the world. You travel on it for days and nights in a

delirium of driving sand, eating and breathing it, and it seems as if the world itself were imaginary as well as the line that is running round it, for all sense of perceptible progression is lost. One relapses into a state of coma as the sand piles up inside the carriages; night follows day, and day fades into night in a scorpion-colored maze until suddenly the aching eye is stung by a slash of vivid green, the first irrigation canals of the Indus. Then the green tillage coming into view seems to be a chromatic miracle, unbelievable, potent, celestial. The camels standing up to their bellies in lush meadows seem like the fantastic herds of another world—the fairy domes of Hyderabad in the distance do not induce an immediate dispersal of the delirium—and it is days before the malignant impress of the desert is completely effaced.

Such is the sinister character of the Great Thar railway. Who could describe the character of the desert through which it runs?

That mysterious line has mysteries on either hand: two kingdoms where neither the forces of progress or of civilization may enter—the mysterious southern kingdom of Kutch and the more mysterious northern kingdom of the Great Thar.

No railway lines are permitted in the kingdom of Kutch and none will ever be attempted in the Great Thar.

We proposed to penetrate to the heart of the great northern mystery.

We debated long and anxiously over the initial stages of our expedition, west through Abdasa or east between the unknown inland seas. Both were fraught with incessant dangers by land and water, both were equally long and arduous.

At last we hung our decision on a spinning coin: heads west, tails east. It fell heads!

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### ACROSS THE GREAT THAR

Westward we started on the following dawn.

I do not propose to describe those weary weeks of travail. Things went fairly smoothly till we left the railway line that seemed, as we left it behind, like a desperate attempt of civilization to scratch a perceptible mark along the edge of the unknowable.

At that point we had lost only two camels, neither Bikaner, so we were still in good spirits.

The water holes are far apart at the beginning of the northward journey, fairly close in the middle and very far apart at the end, where the real danger begins.

The positions of all the water holes are roughly in the form of the arrangement of the stars called the "Great Bear," with a very long tail, ending at the bear's nose. This is the inner half of the route, say the first 200 miles. All the water holes are part of a branch in the tortuous old camel caravan route from Luni to Islamkot, in the days before the railway line, independent of water on its way, struck across country. Soon no man will know the position of the first hole, and then the sands will close over all forever.

We spent nearly five days finding the first water hole. Being due north, we assumed it would be a simple matter to find it, just so many "ahd khos uttar"—that was our initial mistake. We only stumbled on it by accident, for we certainly had lost all accurate record of

direction during the back and forward and circling movements we made while casting around for it. Moolchand, our chief driver, saw it first, and I suspect it was the Bikaner camel he was riding that really "put him wise" in the first place. But for that combination, an intelligent driver and an intelligent camel in the lead, we should never have found even the first water hole. Once the first water hole is found, there is little difficulty in reaching the outermost.

After that—but may Heaven prevent you ever passing the last water hole!

When we reached it, the hole No. 6 on the map, it was dry. It was a shallow hole at best and for some reason, connected I surmise with the movement of the underground streams that fed it, the water had departed. Please remember that we had only taken on enough water at No. 5 to enable us to reach hole No. 6.

We had not pressed our caravan up to that point, loading them as lightly as we dared, for some of our camels were failing and we were prepared to sacrifice everything in order to keep a sufficient number for the establishment of our caches, in the last 250 miles.

We were faced at that empty water hole with the journey back to the last hole, some 65 miles, say three days' traveling or a dash out into the western desolation, of—how much? 35 miles? We could not be certain; all the number of "khos" Rahzan had given us for the holes we had discovered were incorrect, some by 15 or even 20 miles. This westerly hole might even be more, 80 or 90 miles away, and perhaps dry when we got there.

Back we had to go.

Before we started back, Casmyth said:

"Why not try digging down to the water?"

"Impossible, our water-skins are nearly empty, if

we stay here digging, we may never get back at all."

"Well, I'm for trying an hour's digging anyway. One hour won't make any difference one way or the other."

"But it will, I tell you, our camels are failing now, once they begin to drop and we start loading up the others, the whole caravan may break down, and then it will be merely a dash back for life—and good-bye to the treasure for good." Well, my friend begged so hard that at last I gave way. I almost wish that I had cut out my tongue before I spoke that grudging "all right, go ahead." Our expedition was beaten at that moment, even if we had been able to foresee the final difficulty.

Casmyth was Irish and sanguine, and like all Irishmen, hated going back for anything at any time. I had to think of that. He might even have insisted on striking out for the westerly hole, and that was—disaster in plain terms. We had agreed to go back to the last southerly water hole for the price of an hour's digging. I had to be satisfied with that.

Why linger over that digging? There was no more water at the end of the hour than before. The wretched suffering animals sniffed each fresh spadeful of sand as it fell, lolling out their swollen tongues, too dry to bubble impatiently now. The drivers, as anxious as their beasts to peer into the hole, tugged them back. Only two or three of us could dig at a time though Casmyth insisted on being one of the party throughout, doing the heaviest work at the top, in the sun. We toiled till we were sick and vomited with exhaustion, thirst and heat!

It was useless.

Even the camels seemed to know that by now. They had settled around the water hole, swaying their heads

mournfully, and some had even laid their heads on the sand. A very bad sign. If once they rolled over they might never get up again. I could stand it no longer, the hour was well past.

"Come, Casmyth, you have had more than an hour. It is time to go."

Then my friend looked past me, the spade dropped from his hand and his knees sagged as he fell like a dropped bundle by the gritty hole. Sunstroke!

How I cursed that fatuous digging!

Running to our water-skins, I took the least empty and dashed the contents in his face, and packed his neck and spine with wet rags.

Here might be another hour's delay, two!—three!—ten! oh, thank God, he was coming round!

I covered him with blankets propped on spades, and ran to the drivers—

"Give each camel a quarter ration of water and let each man drink two mouthfuls! Then all mount, except Moolchand Chogilal! Let him come to me and lift Naimaht Sahib into the saddle."

Fortunately my friend was able to hold on to the saddle-horn, and if he could be kept there, without further hurt from the sun, till sunset, we might manage yet.

The next two days were a feverish dream spent between my sick friend and the rapidly failing camels. Two dropped on the second day and another on the third.

I suppose it was the uncanny knowledge of the proximity of water that kept the rest going. We had no more casualties till we reached the water hole and then one rolled over and died, soon after drinking. I don't know why, camels rarely drink too much. It must have been something else.

I found it was badly overloaded when I examined

its packs. Someone had been shifting loads without permission. We stayed 48 hours at this water hole to rest the caravan and let Casmyth recover. He was still weak and sick.

We were now encroaching on our reserve fodder, so the dead camels were chiefly a loss as regards the amount of stores they could carry to the forward points in our line of caches.

The next step was a march to the most westerly water hole, No. 7, with a right angle to the unknown water hole, No. 8. If it proved to be dry, a cache was to be made there and a fourth of the caravan turned back. This was the first grave derangement of our program. We had reckoned on three caches only, at a distance of 70 to 80 miles—near enough for the racing Bikaner camels to get back to them, if they were fit when they started back.

We could take no more risks, and we loaded up every remaining camel with the spare water-skins as full as we could fill them.

If the camels dropped from exhaustion it could not be helped. We dare not risk the repetition of the disaster at the northeast hole.

The camels fought with their drivers about starting, and some broke loose and kept us back several hours rounding them up. The Bikaner camels were especially restive under the degradation of carrying hard heavy unyielding loads, for henceforth till our last cache was in place only Casmyth was to ride.

There was a bitter cold wind blowing as we started out for the northwesterly hole, about 11:00 p. m., blowing nearly full in our faces. It made the camels more fractious than ever; I dreaded an increase in wind, it might easily get strong enough to lift the sand and then back we should have to go again. I worried myself sick with anxiety for Casmyth and the

possibility of a sand-storm catching us midway between the water holes.

But it was no use worrying. That would only unfit me for my position of command. If it was coming, it would come. Now, one of the drivers, a misshapen grumbler called Govind, a strong, hardy man despite his hunchback, became insolent and threatened to let his tugging, plunging camel go. He had been grumbling ever since we left the last water hole. This was not yet serious, but if that kind of thing started to spread, then good-bye to discipline. I must jolly them along a bit and give the old rogue a lesson at the same time.

I said to him quietly,

"Govind, when wert thou last paid?"

"One day past," he replied sullenly.

"When dost thou expect to be paid again?"

"Six days hence."

"By whom?"

No answer.

"By whom? Speak fluently, O Govind! for I know, and thy fellows know, fluent speech is thy chief gift." (This produced a slight laugh, as I desired, among the rest of the drivers who were sick of his grumbling.)

Sullen grunt, indicating myself, or so I assumed.

"True, Govind,—thou wast paid by me—as thou hast so eloquently proclaimed."

(More laughter.)

"In good rupees, was it not? With nothing held back, though God knows a hang-back at work at a time like this deserves a hanging-back at pay-time by me. (It is difficult to translate such jests—this is the best I can do.)

"But, look, Govind, of the hanging-back, that hangest ever back, and turnest ever back, that backest not me that hold nothing back"—and so on and so on. (Such punning possibilities are endless in the lan-

guage—though these were not the actual puns I employed.)

The whole caravan was roaring with laughter now as I improvised on the wretched Govind, occasionally helped out by Casmyth, until it became a song with a regular tune and time.

And so for that once we plodded gaily enough through the dark night. Meanwhile I watched the sky, low down near the horizon; if the stars became indistinct,—our chorus would have a woeful ending. We reached the seventh water hole as the sand began to lift on the second evening.

It was not a bad storm, intermittent enough to prevent the sand getting well off the ground into the air. It kept us two days at No. 7 hole, eating into our reserve fodder. The water in the hole was distinctly brackish and deep down, and it was extremely exhausting getting it up. Tempers suffered in consequence.

To crown my exasperation, the wretched Govind gave me some more impertinence when I checked him for idling at the water hole, and I fined him ten rupees on the spot. That is a large sum for such a man, nearly a week's pay, but I had to make an example, and, besides, I was worried to death about Casmyth. He was still feverish and could eat practically nothing.

We spent the two days in the shelter of some rocks near the water hole, dressing the camel's harness-galls, and reapportioning loads.

On the third day, about 8:00 a. m. the wind had died down enough to permit a start. We could not go far before the heat of the day stopped us, but I was anxious to get the question of the first cache settled, and one party turned back before our rations were hopelessly reduced. It might even be necessary to return to No. 7 if a sandstorm caught us on the way to No. 8.

I went to Casmyth and said, "Are you fit enough to

travel a few hours this morning before the heat is too great?"

"Must we do that?"

"No 'must' about it, but I think we ought, our reserves are getting low."

"Well, I can manage, I think."

So we got under way and marched for two hours, and then the heat of the day made further progress impossible. We had taken nearly an hour to get under way at No. 7, you must remember. We stopped the caravan in a shallow ravine, got the camels down into as much shade as we could find for them, and dug shelters for ourselves, propping the sand back with saddles, packs and water-skins, with blankets tied over and between.

The sun seemed to blaze out of the wind-swept sky with redoubled fury. The heat was terrific—an inferno. Casmyth's fever went up again and I prayed for the evening. That was all I could do, and hope that the wind would not come down to lower levels.

Only those who have suffered the terrors of a sand-storm in the desert know what it means to watch every wisp of cloud in the sky all day for signs that may herald a descending wind.

From a hole amongst the packs near the top of the ravine, I watched the sky till my eyes ached and smarted as if they had been rubbed with salt. Then a miracle happened.

I had seen a suspicious bunching of the ragged cloud streamers in the northwest part of the sky. Hot puffs of wind kept coming along the plain and I was on the point of ordering the caravan to get on the move, back to No. 7, when some driver shouted:

*"Pani, Sahib, hi!"*

It was true.

Rain was beginning to fall, rare large drops at first,

and then a miracle of rainbow-hued showers; such rainbows as can only be seen in the desert; not regular arcs across the sky, of course, but dancing, shimmering will-o'-the-wisp spectrums moving toward us near the ground, disappearing, appearing nearer, then farther away, always flickering up and down.

It might have been the first rain there in a dozen years, or even a hundred. Who can tell?

The showers lasted off and on all that afternoon, making the afternoon almost cool and I had to wrap Casmyth up for fear he might catch a chill. I am not certain that I was in time, for later in the night he was in a high fever again.

The rain was never enough to wet a handkerchief thoroughly, but the air was freshened by the little showers, and the whole caravan brisked up, men and camels, and about 6:00 p. m. we moved forward, confident that we should reach the last water hole by the morning.

We never found that water. Perhaps some lapse in the old warrior's memory threw all our hopes out, some mistake of my interpretation of the distances or direction intervening, or it may be that the water had long since dried up and the hole gotten covered over by the shifting sand. But could I be sure that we had not passed it or overlooked it? The camels would have settled that question for us if we had ever been near. It was no use searching for water holes on this side of the old trail.

The only known passage from the "Bear's Nose" is eastward in a semicircle back to Luni, along a sparsely distributed line of water holes.

(Luni, by the way, should be about 300 miles north-east of the point shown on Rahzan's map. Also Harhar is on the wrong side of the railway, by about 200 miles! I underlined both in red ink and indicated the

discrepancies soon after Rahzan died on the *Ranee*. It was better to leave them so, as everything else in connection with the sketch is relative to the railway line from Luni to Umarkot.)

Well, I felt near the end of my tether, although our outward journey was not half over. Casmyth was getting worse instead of better and many of our camels were in a bad way.

What should I do?

The thought came over me in overwhelming force that perhaps No. 8 water hole had never existed except in Rahzan's imagination. It is quite off the general trend of the old caravan trail to Luni. How I wished we had thought of making our first cache at No. 5!—but that sort of post-mortem precaution will soften the hardest brain. I flung the idea off and looked to practical forward possibilities.

I have recorded that we spent several days trying to find the first water hole in the line of march, and even then, keen, fresh and enthusiastic as we were, we nearly missed it. How much more likely were we in our present state to have missed this last hole. Even if I cast around and did eventually find it, what then? Our men and camels would be fit for nothing. That aimless wandering about the desert saps all the virtue out of man and beast. Several times on the search for the first water hole, both Casmyth and I had been on the point of giving up the whole expedition.

To go back was likely to lose us as many camels as going forward, and on top of those losses, would be the depressing knowledge that the caches were not even started.

There was no help for it.

We must face the matter out.

Forward for the last dash at once, or back for good.

I went to Casmyth, who had been placed in the

shade of some piled-up gear. He was clear in mind, but weak and ill.

"Casmyth, we are up against it, the time has come to make the last throw."

"I know, no need to explain."

"Are you fit to attempt it?"

"I can manage."

"Would you prefer to stay here with a party at a cache till I return?"

"No, that means a lot of stores and water consumed by people who ought to be moving back and living on the country chiefly. I will come with you; I may throw this thing off, and I can always stop at the last cache, if the worst comes to the worst."

"But if you stay here now, you can keep in the shade, and—er—recuperate."

"Rubbish! We are not going to travel in the heat of the day, in any case. I should only worry myself to death about you—and that is no better than pegging out on the move. I'm coming along, old man."

So it was arranged.

Truth to tell, I would have been glad to know there was someone responsible at my back to help me, when the return journey was to be faced, someone who might see me afar off and help me to the water and stores I might sadly need. Dumb piles of stores don't help much in such emergencies, they are easily missed, covered over with drifts, or mistaken for rocks or sand-heaps, when the eyes of an exhausted man are the only look-out.

We arranged everything for the immediate deposit of the first cache. The whole being gathered together and packed on our poorest camels, these were to be led out, and ridden in as soon as the cache was established.

At twilight we set off.

Moolchand came to me at the tail of the caravan

soon after we started and asked what our movements were. I told him "*ultar pura ka konah ki*" ("north, bearing slightly east").

He exclaimed that no water was to be found northward and started an argument to which I listened carelessly and repeated my instruction.

He then broke out into loud protestations, working himself up into a fury, and became so voluble that I had to give him a taste of Govind's medicine.

All this took place in the rear of the caravan, for latterly I had kept the tail of the caravan (relieving the monotony by occasionally mounting and making excursions along our flanks) to see everything that went on; it was dusty, and otherwise unpleasant, but essential, with Casmyth on the sick-list.

I had dropped back with Moolchand, well in the rear of the caravan, soon after he came to me. I was unwilling to let the caravan hear our quarreling. He was the chief driver and a very intelligent man after all, and if he chose, he could wreck the whole expedition at once.

I warned Moolchand that I would stand no more loose talk, and that he was to go forward at once to his proper place. He hesitated and I seized my chance.

"So," said I, "we have two hang-backs in our midst! Shall I make thee the subject of a song, even as Govind? Thou knowest I am a man of powerful inspiration, and a very great fluency of speech. I will lash thee more painfully than whips, yea than whips of scorpions, if thou art still by my side one moment from now! Go to thy place, lest the whole caravan laugh thee to scorn till thy life becomes a burden to thee! Go! I say! Thou mayest, perchance, die of thirst in this desert, even as thy doleful prediction, but I promise thee thou shalt most certainly die of shame by lingering here!"

He went!

As he kicked his camel forward, I called to him to halt and return.

"Moolchand!"

"Sahib!"

"Thou art mulct in six rupees at our next reckoning."

He bowed his head and went to his place.

I inflicted the fine to drive home the fact that I had regained complete ascendancy over him, to illustrate my proper authority, and to keep the lesson in his mind some time.

He was not an Arab.

If he had been, the threat of my poetic wrath ever ready to pour over him, would have been enough. All poets are men with the finger of God on them, amongst Arabs. It is sufficient to threaten poetic frenzy to ensure obedience even in great emergency. He had lived most of his life amongst Arabs, but that does not confer the capacity to appreciate the power of poetic fires.

So for that once mutiny was quelled. I could not help wondering how long it would be before the next case would arise and how numerous the mutinies would be. In the desert, masters must be masters in all things, and at all times. I must watch all signs of unrest.

The fine inflicted on Moolchand was a just one and served its purpose at the time, though it was never collected, any more than Govind's was.

If the head will not go forward then must be twisting at the tail!

I was determined to go just as far as I dared, before depositing the first cache. I was indifferent, to some extent, of the suffering likely to fall upon the men and camels who would turn back.

The desert is like war—weaklings and wounded are a nuisance chiefly.

Is this callous? Well, it is fact. I had selected with

care, the weakest and least useful men and beasts for that first section and loaded them with no more than their exact rations and the biggest cache I could contrive. If any camels broke down—well, the driver was out of luck. He would probably have to walk most of the way home, instead of riding.

I meant that first drive to be a long one, and meant to weed out all the weaklings, too. I was ready to cut that first section off as soon as they could be driven no longer.

The strength of a caravan is only the strength of the weakest units. When these break down the caravan must stop, or cut them off and leave them behind. That is exactly what I proposed to do.

You see my difficulty? I was unable to leave a guard behind to prevent pilfering at the cache, after we had passed on. When the camels began to fail badly I meant to take over the cache stores and drive these weaklings back, depositing the stores some distance ahead in a place unknown to them. They would be liable to be pilfered by other returning parties, but these would be better men on better beasts, and only small parties at that, with adequate rations.

As an additional precaution, I stopped all pay at the commencement of the first drive. Any pilfering would be dealt with later by an over-all deduction. Each man would therefore watch his neighbor. Notes, written in my hand, for amounts due were given to each man henceforth, instead of money, and this in the desert was no hardship.

By alternately encouraging and stinging Moolchand, I worked him up into a state where he would have gladly plowed on till he fell headlong from exhaustion. Also the egregious Govind was kept constantly at my side, and with a running fire of caustic comment on that butt, the whole body of the caravan

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was amused and their thoughts diverted from their sufferings. He was a strong, bold, twisted rogue, and I twisted him unmercifully, but it was the only mode of appeal to such a character. Sullen, quarrelsome, insolent, misshapen, he was as tough as teak, and like teak, he exuded an oil when roughly trimmed.

He stayed with the caravan till the last cache was deposited, and nearly broke my heart by offering to stay there till we returned—alone!

The full value of such an offer cannot be described. If by some incredible power of persuasion he had induced me to accept his offer, we should have found a madman on our return!

Hail to thee, Govind, wherever thou art!  
Thy spirit and thy person were twisted alike,  
But by Brahma and Vishnu and Siva, they were both  
tough and twisted tightly!  
In thy next avatar thou shalt surely be untwisted;  
As a tall and handsome person with a lion-heart shall  
be thy incarnation.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### DISASTER IN THE DESERT

We drove on three days and nights, halting only in the greatest heat of the day. The time for drastic action had come. Two camels had already been lost, but I allowed no man to linger, after their throats were cut.

I calculated that we were now about 50 miles beyond the dry water hole. We had retrieved a bad beginning.

Casmyth, too, had picked up considerably, and altogether things looked better.

There remained roughly 200 miles to go.

It was about 10:30 a. m. that I called a halt as a third camel plunged and rolled its legs to the sky.

"Ho! Moolchand Bas!"

"Ho! Govind, come thou hither, handing thy camel to thy neighbor the while!" I shouted, as I rode between the latter half of the caravan and the head part.

"Moolchand! Forward with the head of the column, —*jeldi jao!*"

Then all the cache stores were deposited on the ground, Govind checking every package and skin of water, and fiercely assaulting all who would stay him. Then I ordered the whole tail to get under way and depart and save their lives, if they could. The important part of the caravan was out of hearing and I did not care what I said to these people, provided it instilled in them some fear of lingering. Some,

realizing in that moment that they were in for a spell of danger and suffering requiring endurance and self-reliance, begged to stay with me; Govind beat them unmercifully till they turned and fled with their fellows.

When all were out of sight, I left Govind in charge of the piled-up stores, dropped my own load and raced after the head of the caravan. We returned, piled the cache temporarily onto the strongest camels and plodded on for an hour. Then the heat drove us to ground.

We reckoned on carrying the cache another three hours forward without endangering more camels, in the cool of the evening.

So it was done, with a pole and flag firmly planted and guyed beside the stores to guide us back.

Then we pushed on; swifter now that the weaklings were no longer lagging behind.

This evening Casmyth said he felt almost normal, the first time since his sunstroke.

Then came the mutiny.

Casmyth had taken me aside and informed me of a general bunching and grouching that took place while I was away turning back the first section. He had wisely ignored it, as Moolchand seemed willing and anxious even to deal with it himself.

As the night wore on to daybreak I thought it was unwise to ignore longer the muttering and bunching together of the drivers. I called a halt.

This was the moment to select my next section for the rear. I made a brief speech stating what distance we proposed to go with each of the two next sections, and enlarging on the task Casmyth and I proposed to undertake together without other company whatsoever, then I rode to the middle of our flank and said:

"Turn all men and look upon me and mark my words. Let all who are poor in spirit, fearful, timorous

men, step backward that they may be marked for early dismissal, and let all those brave spirits, lion-hearted men, step forward making a clear division, that I may reward such liberally henceforth, each to have such and such rupees extra daily at each and every accounting."

It was an excellent plan.

About half and half was the result.

So the division was made and kept.

The best camels amongst the poor-spirited drivers were taken from them despite their loud cries (this was no time to consider sentimental attachments), burdens were shifted, camels exchanged and the stalwarts, with Moolchand at their head, marshaled apart. When all was arranged I called in a loud voice:

"Ho! Moolchand, forward with thy lion-hearted band! For the rest, I will lead you, and Govind the twisted shall come after you, with my stick in his hand, and my authority in his mouth, for verily since ye will not drive yourselves, ye shall be driven. Ho! Govind! Take this my stick, it is a master's stick, use it masterfully!"

I drove and led that rear half of the caravan another day and a half, say 30 miles. Then they were turned back like the first section, but the cache was not taken further forward.

We now had 140 miles or so to go. I knew the last half of my men would stick by me for a long way now. They had been made princes amongst their fellows, both in substance and in honor, for their increased pay was now very great. But the question was not of men, but of camels. How far dare we drive on without serious risk of life to the drivers on the return. Say 50 miles at the most. Say four days' traveling, in the exhausted overburdened state of the beasts, less if casualties were frequent, leaving 90 miles for our final

dash. The lion-hearted band moved forward steadily but silently henceforth.

Then disaster followed swiftly upon disaster. Camels flagged and fell, were kicked up, their burdens shifted and reduced, plunged on in the soft sand, and fell to rise no more.

"Halt!" was hoarsely passed along the flanks.

A swift slash across the stretched windpipe, a hurried burial of water-skins, and—

"Ho! Moolchand forward!"

The rapidity with which camels were dropping daily caused me to change my plans; a line of stores was as effective as a pile (there was no virtue in the actual shape of cache); let the camels and burdens drop, each carcass would serve as a milestone and a cache mark. So we only removed water-skins. Soon we could advance no further as a party, straggling became habitual, and loads were left untouched and unadjusted, for Casmyth had exposed himself to the sun laboring at the knots and packs, and was nearly as bad as he had ever been. My hands were too full tending my friend to superintend the pack-saddles, so they stayed as they sagged. A few more miles, and then—

Farewell to even the lion-hearted! Farewell, perhaps, to my dear friend!

The last few days had been a terrible struggle. Worry, fatigue, lack of sleep and proper food and drink were taking their toll. Had I been touched by sun? Probably! I dare not think of it, I must not fall ill as well as my friend. My part was to drive—all men and beasts onward, and sand, wind, thirst and sleep aside, but ever I drove all with fury and curses. At last came the moment when both Moolchand and Govind withstood my fury; they would go on, they informed me, but the rest would die where they stood rather than proceed farther. They were strung out be-

hind for a mile or more, as I could see, now that I looked back.

A mist came before my eyes as I slashed at them with my stick. They melted away, sinking into the sand before me!

When I came to myself I was in a dark hole made with blankets and saddles, and Casmyth was swabbing my neck and breast.

He laughed weakly as I opened my eyes.

"See, the doctors cannot cure themselves, the patient saves their lives, as ever."

"What happened?"

"You fainted this morning, and Govind has a black eye, a present from you."

"Good God, did I do that?"

"Even so, slave-driver."

"I'm sorry, where is he?"

"Outside, making you some tea, over a fire of broken pack-saddles. Two more camels gone west."

"Ho! Govind!"

"Sahib, I come, with the life-giving *char*" (tea).

"Give me thy hand, Govind."

Then he carefully wiped his left and we shook hands in silence. No Indian of his degree will offer his right. If he should do so, strike him to the ground. It is insolence,—for a reason.

I should have known better than to offer my hand, but the wretched Western hand-shaking habit rose up in the moment of contrition for my merciless jeering at the stout rogue.

"Govind, I must turn thee back tonight. I go forward, far into the Thar, with Naimaht Sahib, on our own private affairs."

"Not so, Sahib. I will go with thee; Moolchand shall lead the remainder of thy caravan back."

"That may not be, go thou also with Moolchand."

"Then will I stay here till thou returnest, for I see that thy affairs in the far desert are not for such as I to share."

"Govind, thou wilt break my heart, for I have in my mind harder words I dealt thee than the blow that darkened thine eye."

"Trifles, Sahib. I am an evil-tempered old man, stirring up mischief despite myself, prompted by the devils that twisted my body at birth."

"All men have some devils in possession, Govind, some for a long time, some for shorter,—here is twenty rupees; also, thy fine of ten I remit in presence of Naimaht Sahib. Go now, old lion-heart, for we have much to discuss ere night falls."

"Salaam, Sahib!"

"Salaam, good old sour and tough. That's a great old fellow, Casmyth."

"He is, did you see his eye? I suppose it was too dark."

"When I've drunk this tea we must settle our last wills and testaments, old man."

"Begad, you're right—I'm in the mood for it—I feel like death warmed up; how do you feel now?"

"Ditto."

"Well, let's turn back while there is a chance of saving our lives at least."

I could not help thinking of a conversation we had together, just before we sold "Kashmir-i-Kutch." Then I was the waverer, now he was. Strength ebbs and flows in men, and the strong keep of their minds is ever betrayed by the weaknesses of the body.

"No, I will go on," I said. "Having come this far—death is near us in either case, forward or back. I feel damnable."

"Then I will go with you, for we are both damned sick."

"Is there any brandy left?"

"Only about half a pint, I'm sorry to say. I've been keeping going with sips of it the last few days."

"Then let us each have one mouthful."

"Right, then you had better keep the flask."

After the brandy had worked in us a little we fell to calculating how far we had to go, and the dispositions we ought to make for the last dash forward. We spoke spasmodically, with long meaningless pauses—sick in mind and body.

It could not be more than 80 miles ahead now, the treasure, if it was there at all! But why do I say that!

It was there, we saw it!

Not in the form we imagined, but it was there, the treasure of the greatest race the world has ever seen, the vast stores of currency of an empire that was forgotten thousands of years even before Ethiopia was founded.

Great white shining heaps of treasure, collected before the Great Thar rose out of the bed of the sparkling gulfs fringing the vast treasure-house of the birth-place of mankind.

What is treasure? That which the majority of mankind in any place decides to value highly.

Are rubies more useful or intrinsically more precious than pieces of red-colored glass?

Are diamonds really more precious than rubies?

Put the questions to me ten thousand years hence and I will give you a just estimation of their value. That is impossible, you say. So is it impossible to justly estimate the true value of any treasure.

Golconda and Kimberly will one day be legendary and lost treasures, when Europe is a legend, and America only a memory.

I need not say that we did not bring any of that treasure away, not so much as one small grain of it.

On the third day after we parted from our caravan, a mild northwesterly wind began to get up, refreshing our weary bodies, clearing our minds, filling us with new hope and leading us on with sufficient vigor to advance—into the heart of a sandstorm.

The fourth day saw us battling for each foot we advanced, sand filling our eyes, nostrils and mouths, sand working into groin and arm-pits, filling our clothes, inflaming our joints and torturing us with its ceaseless stinging blast. Lately, the line of march seemed to be uphill in some extraordinary way, like a steep ridge.

Every few yards we had to fight our camels to turn them to face the storm, and at last, worn out with fatigue and despair, panting, with our heads in the shelter of the camels' bellies, we decided to let the two spare camels go. We could fight no more against them up that rising ground.

Onward we struggled, with only two camels now. Casmyth was fast giving out, only by holding on to my shoulder and a camel pack could he progress at all.

Then the end came suddenly. The day became as night, dark with flying sand, we could breathe no longer, even through the folds of our head cloths. Men and camels sank to the ground huddled together to die in company with each other.

How long we lay there in that deathly stupor of total blackness, of semi-suffocation, I do not know. Half a day? A day and night? A nightmare of suffocating years?

When the sand storm eased off, the camels were gone. The air was still thick with sand, but it was possible to make sure of that awful fact.

I crawled to Casmyth and opened the neck of our last water-skin over his face. He smiled wearily, like

the mechanical distortion of a mask; then the mask fell sideways, still, as in death.

Painfully fumbling in my clothes, I felt for the flask with our last mouthful of brandy. God, had I lost it? It must be in my breast pocket. Gone!

The end?—nearly so.

Crawling back to the place where I had recently lain, I scrabbled in the sand with my hands,—and found the flask. It had fallen out of my pocket. A little of the brandy mixed with water, forced between Casmyth's blackened lips on a rag, revived my friend. We sucked the rag in turn. The sand had stopped blowing now. The air was rapidly getting clear, only far away to the south lay the blackness that had passed over us so recently. A little strength crept into us under the influence of that French essence. Soon Casmyth raised himself on his elbow and terrified me by staring with glazed eyes past my face,—was he going mad?—then slowly raising his hand from the ground, he pointed over my shoulder—hoarsely whispering—

“Look!”

“The treasure!”

Just across a shallow, narrow lake, on the north shore, lay the shining white heaps tinged with rose in the light of the setting sun. How far? Half a mile? A mile? It might as well be a million, as far as we were concerned with it henceforth. The lake wound and twisted east and west as far as the eye could see.

The bitter sting of that sight was as salt flung in the eyes!

Even as we looked the sun sank and the treasure departed from our sight.

In the twilight we signed to each other to depart from that place. Painfully we crawled, each movement searing the exposed flesh of our sand-sores like

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red-hot irons. Onward we crawled, slowly southward, to the ridge before us, now seeming in our plight like a mountain. We would die together there. Casmyth could go no further.

Putting his arm over my neck, I dragged him at last to the rim and looking over it, there were our lost camels! Resting even as they had been sheltered from the storm, wiser than men in their knowledge of storms.

I think we both fainted then. It was a long time before I gathered sufficient strength and courage to creep down to the camels and seize their long head-ropes, fearful that they might rise and bolt as I approached.

One camel still had a full water-skin, and the others various foodstuffs. That ridge was not our last resting-place.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### “EAST IS EAST”

There is not much more to tell, only the consummation of my friend Viroschand's earthly avatar and a little unraveling to show how it became intermingled with mine, in Vishnu Land. I have tried to illustrate the significance of that avatar by using the reflected images in the mirror of two Western minds, my own chiefly (and Casmyth's in a lesser degree) since it is nearly impossible for a Westerner to look directly into the mirror of an Indian mind without coming to the conclusion that all is distorted, or even completely darkened.

Indeed, it was only the sympathy that Viroschand had for Western things, and myself in particular, that has enabled me to reflect and record any comprehensible aspects of such an intricate and subtle subject.

Such sympathy is neither rare nor curious, but it is invariably destructive to its possessor, according to the degree of its successful appeal.

The Indian mind (I speak now of the better sort) is forever striving to arrive at a sympathetic equation with the Western attitude of mind, destroying itself in the attempt. Tragedy is the inevitable and final result, tragedy that can only be equaled in magnitude and intensity by the results of such an equation inversely resolved,—for it is true of the better sort of Westerner in India—the Western mentality and the Eastern attempting the same hybrid equation, with the same

disastrous results. When the sexes are involved,—but why expound the obvious?

Viroschand's mistaken loyalty to us, and his loyalty to a standard of ethics that he adopted with the enthusiastic altruism of his race,—these destroyed him, as you know.

That I was not destroyed by similar forces is only attributable to my incapacity to appreciate, to the extent Viroschand did, the full bitterness of utter despair. That is merely saying I was coarser in moral fiber.

I *would not* appreciate to the full the meaning of our disaster—he *could not* escape the full appreciation of it. In the bitterness of complete defeat he turned his face to the wall—and died. When our friend returned from Bombay, after his last unsuccessful attempt to arrange a composition with his creditors—the lawsuits I have mentioned were pushed vigorously against him. The disappointed mortgagees of the *Shah Jehan* were amongst his bitterest creditors. He would not involve us in that—nor explain the disappearance of the mortgaged vessel—and he lost his case—the first of a series. The penalty was more than he could bear. In the subsequent smuggling case brought against us shortly after, for we had no means now to enable us to fly from that nemesis, we would not involve Viroschand's sister, and we lost our case—and paid the penalty.

I can never hope to justify to a Western mind the mistaken friendship that prompted Viroschand to let us take a mortgaged ship for our enterprises. I am certain that he was animated by a form of altruism when he did so. He is justified in my own mind, sufficiently, that is enough. We fired his imagination with a spurious, shoddy sporting aspect of the whole matter,—was it not a dear ambition of his heart to be a sportsman, too?

What Western mind can enter into the trouble of spirit that took possession of him when he found that he could not raise the mortgage on the ship, after he had obliged his friends with the loan of it? When the wholesale embezzlement of his own head clerk brought his affairs crashing to the ground, we were nearly a thousand miles away. His inveterate gambling had laid him open to complete ruin then by inducing him to consider our enterprise in the light of another sporting gamble,—a little side bet with a friend, a debt of honor to the last.

I daresay everything he ever possessed was mortgaged at some time or other. What was one little mortgage more or less to him! I believe he would have escaped, as a bankrupt, but for that defalcation. The fraudulent character of the article we proposed to foist on his countrymen had given him intense pain; that is an aspect of the matter I can never hope to make clear to a Western mind. The table waters were no more fraudulent (to us) than 90 per cent of the articles in every drug-store in the land—the pastes, pills, powders and potions with sovereign remedial powers over every disease known to man.

But for educated people to traffic in such things, particularly, sympathetic friends he admired—that was utterly abhorrent to his mind. But he succumbed to our enthusiastic bluff, and forced himself, for our sakes, to adopt our point of view. As for our traffic in opium—that was so incredible that I believe he considered his sister was a devil who took our senses away to further her own evil ends, and that we were in no way responsible for our actions while under her influence. Virochand could have won his case by adopting the Indian point of view on the Western jury system. But he would not do that; he alone was involved, he and his dear adopted Western sportsmanship that invested his



